

# Lesley Battler | Journal | 1984





## **Journal archive project**

### **Introduction**

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

#### **Vol. 4, 1984**

Last term at Seneca College – More dinners, midnight feasts – Life, the universe and everything at Sherwoods – Close encounters on the TTC – Encroaching adulthood – Job interviews – Tall ships festival in Québec City – A momentous visit to Montréal – Montréal, the Second Coming – Building another new life – Concerts at the Spectrum – Films at Cinema V – I become a telecommunications librarian and astrologer – Office fiascos – Dawning of the New Age – Unfinished business in Ottawa.

**Jan. 4**

Kim's for dinner, the entire Gang of 8 tonight. Kim spent most of the time preparing amazing quantities of food, making everything perfect for her company. We watched videos, and it was funny to see how different we all were. Nancy and I enjoyed the show *25 Years of Motown* and we sang along. Johanne showed us a book of some of her drawings and poetry. Johanne, Nancy and I talked about Anthony Burgess and his use of language. Lynn looked at us and said, "Well, I picked up an Agatha Christie to read over the holidays."

It is so hard for a group to accommodate eight completely different people. I know Joanne often feels left out of these conversations. Different people's interests lead the whole group down many diverse paths. Johanne mentioned that she and Ellen had attended a lecture on Irish nationalism. We finally settled on watching *Flashdance*, Ellen's favourite movie, the one that received the most consensus. Except for Johanne, who sat slumped on the couch, decidedly unimpressed.

Kim played music and by this time, Ellen had drunk a lot of wine. She turned the stereo up and danced. Her favourite song is Supertramp's "School," and she cranked it as loud as it could go. Ellen is so full of surprises! Nancy, of course, was enjoying herself. She is the heart and soul of this group, never misses a get-together. We were all dancing except for Lynn. Nancy finally induced her to join us by teasing her. "Oh, Lynn's too cool to get up and dance." So Lynn did get up and dance, light on her feet, pixie-like, smiling and waving self-consciously. And yes, she did look very cool and ironic. Kim, who is actually the oldest of us, brought out a box of her old 45s and played the Troggs's "Love Is All Around" and The Small Faces, "Itchy Coo Park." She showed us photos she took of people in the class. They are excellent. She captured everyone's personalities.

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Sharon called. She was cheerful and we had a good talk. Amusingly, she has now completely revamped her opinion on unemployment. Since she has now experienced being unemployed, it's all right for others as well. It is now okay in her books to go back to school, work in factories, beer stores or wherever jobs might be found. I no longer hear her talk about ambition and being something in life. We also talked about how she was brought up Presbyterian, and to this day feels it's the best way for her to live. This is her theme du jour. No longer jobs or women's issues. She also talked about her interest in Canadian and local history.

### **Jan. 9**

Went to see *Silkwood* with Sharon and Ernie. A powerful movie that certainly succeeded in getting its message across. The character of Karen Silkwood was intriguing and complex, and Meryl Streep was excellent in that role.

After the movie we returned to their apartment and spent a comfortable evening. Fred and Ernie worked on short-wave radios while Sharon and I talked. She talked about her childhood. She told me how her sister Gail had wanted to be a ballerina and looked so delicate and feminine in her outfit. They had read the Babar the Elephant stories. She talked about her father, telling me things I never knew before, bringing him to life. He worked at Dupont and the other men looked up to him because he was intelligent and had a book in the pocket of his coveralls all the time. Mr Thorpe also drew cartoons of his co-workers and it was considered an honour to have him draw you. The people in the plant thought Sharon was just like him because she also always carried a book with her. I really like hearing these stories. The only things I knew about him before tonight were his affair with Betty, and how he wouldn't take care of himself physically.

### **Jan. 10**

Registration for 4<sup>th</sup> term. I collected my transcript then hid in the lineup, hoping to skulk out the back exit before looking at my cataloguing mark. But when I looked, I saw an A in Cataloguing!!! Mr A also gave me an A in his Special Collections class as well. (Kim got a C.) After all that drama in A-V, Rushton passed me. I was the only one of the three delinquents who got the pass. I danced around with Els, who was also jubilant. I mentioned to Mr Alchuk that I was very happy. “You got your Cataloguing,” he said. “You did well.”

Nancy said something interesting to Els about Ellen. We all agreed that Ellen is full of surprises. Els said Ellen was like deep water, then Nancy said that dark things often came out of those depths.

Went to Sherwood's. Eva came with us and made Ellen feel ill at ease. In Kim's photos of the night at her place, Ellen is drunk with a hat on her head, looking strangely isolated. At Sherwood's Eva prattled, concentrating on one person then switching to the next, but never talking to the group. Four of us on the subway. Johanne and Eva sat together, looking like twins, bundled up in thick coats so there was no room for anyone else. Ellen sat down next to me, and seemed very relieved I was there, that she didn't have to sit with the other two.

### **Jan. 11**

Went to Mika's house. Cold day. Ellen, Nancy and Kim there when I arrived. Mika was sweet and hospitable. Mika lives with her mother. The house is spotless, but not formal like Ellen's family home. There are plants everywhere, colourful Ukrainian decorations, Easter eggs. She was in the kitchen preparing salmon mousse for us. Mika is sophisticated and cosmopolitan. She is also a homebody, sweet and comfortable, doing everything herself, talking with her mother and sister as if there was no world at all outside their cozy kitchen. Like a chameleon, she blends in with her environment.

Nancy started pointing out designs in Mika's French fashion magazines that she thought I would like. I was so flattered to here she thought so highly of my sense of style. Ellen pored over stories about Princess Di. Mika is in her element when talking about her travels. She showed us her photos of England, Wales and Jamaica and told travel stories. She looks different in each country – all kinds of Mikas I have not seen yet. She also showed us some old photos of her ancestors and talked about her family and the war years.

Mrs Gembatiuk came back from babysitting four boys in Mississauga. She is quite a bit older than my parents, but feisty and full of energy. She advised us not to wait too late to have children as she did, because then we would not have enough patience. Her accent was heavy and she spoke rapidly, so I had to really listen to catch what she was saying. She said life was difficult, but they had always done their best for the girls, encouraging their dancing, music, painting. When we were on our way out the door, she exhorted us to put on warm hats and scarves before venturing outside.

### **Jan. 12**

School begins again. Sat beside Andrea Jones. She told me how happy she was that I was back. Talked to Mikiko and brought her my Kitaro album so she could see it and maybe translate the liner notes for me.

Lovely moment with Sharon Cooper today. Unlike Mika, Sharon does not come from a warm supportive family. Shortly after she was born she contracted rubella, which affected her coordination and motor ability. She has no lenses in her eyes. On top of it all, she has horrible parents. They, especially her father, put a lot of pressure on her to succeed and make fun of her when her marks are poor. Her father calls her an "old maid" and says he will disown her if she does not marry a Jewish man. Her mother screamed at her because she came home late from school because of cataloguing. Sharon was so worried about passing Cataloging, she went to a synagogue to pray. Mr Alchuk set her mind at rest by telling her she got a B in Cataloguing. She burst into the typing room, happier than I have seen her. Fortunately, the right people were in the room – the usual typing room irregulars. "I passed Cataloguing!" she cried. Fred Merritt embraced her and we celebrated.



Sharon has a great champion in Norma McNaught. Norma encourages Sharon with her positive attitude. Norma has a lot of courage and personal integrity. Once Neysha Sima was nagging Mr A, pointing at him with those little claw-like fingers, telling him he “couldn’t do this to her.” Mr Alchuk had turned pale and was trying to control himself. Norma summoned Sharon and they both left the room because they were embarrassed for him. They did not want to see the spectacle. Afterwards Norma told Neysha that she should not say things like that to anyone – she should respect her elders. Soon after that incident, Neysha brought around a petition against Mr Alchuk and Ms Dodd, hoping to stir up mischief. Norma told Neysha flat out that she didn’t want anything to do with it. No one did, not even Kim.

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Walked to Sherwood’s with Nancy and Johanne C. We were talking about Mr A’s class, when I spotted him trudging up the street not twenty feet away from us. I pointed him out and Johanne blustered, “No it’s not – that’s a girl!” He is very small from behind, hidden in his dark coat. Nancy said, “I think I have seen that coat on him before. Shh, he has hearing like a cat.” He stopped at the corner and we saw that it was indeed Mr A.

Johanne is very conscious of sexual distinctions. She dislikes ambiguity and can’t understand blurring the distinctions. She dislikes Michael Jackson because “he hasn’t made up his mind whether to be a man or a woman.” Johanne’s conversations on sex are direct and honest, often graphic. She does not hesitate to talk about her own experiences. Sometimes she sounds a lot like Sharon Thorpe, but she is actually quite easy to get along with, and we can talk about a great many subjects. She, Nancy and I talked about relationships, marriage, and what happens when you fall in love with someone else when you are married. Nancy said that love changes when you with someone over a few years. It becomes less passionate, more contented.

Met Ellen and Kim at Sherwood’s. Kim has taken Ellen under her wing, and Ellen has responded with gratitude and loyalty. We talked about dreams. Ellen mentioned she dreamed she was in someone’s car, drinking out of a bottle. She was alarmed because she knew she was breaking the law, but she was so compelled to do it she couldn’t stop. Yes, a lot of depth to Ellen.

## **Jan. 20**

Feeling somewhat dejected and not in the mood for Fred Merritt's optimism and relentless inquisitiveness. Mr A dropped down beside me, after having materialized out of the crowd at the bus stop. He appears and disappears on little cat feet, and notices everything. He noticed I had been glancing over my shoulder at the stop, hoping FM wouldn't be there.

"You got away," he said, smiling.

Then I looked out the window and saw "Mr Merritt" leaping and bounding up to the bus, which had just pulled out. FM stopped short, looking around with a forlorn expression on his face.

"Oh dear," I said, "I feel mean."

"He won't wait out there too long will he?"

"No, I don't think so. This happens a few times."

"He knows the procedure." Slight chuckle.

"Most of the time I really don't mind, but today ..."

"You just can't swing it."

Mr A mentioned he was getting off at Bayview and had to keep saying the name in his mind so he wouldn't go all the way down to college. He was visiting his sister, who is in town with his niece and nephew (ages 5 and 9). We talked about special libraries for a while. He managed to get off at his stop and I went on to Finch Station, only to run into Fred Merritt. Our buses had leapfrogged all the way to the station. Way to go, TTC.

## **Jan. 26**

Three-day escape to Montréal. Roads treacherous and snow-covered, bordered on both sides by an abyss. Since this is a Thursday night, there are only a few cars on the road. Mostly trucks. Strings of red lights winking in the darkness; signals, messages, exchanges. We run along the edge of the world at Prescott, the lights of the bridge so ethereal I can barely see them through the fog.

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Went to Westmount Library to do research for my essay, “Bill 51 and the Westmount Library,” how the changes brought in by the bill have affected the community and its library. The reference library, Jerilyn Dietrich was helpful and encouraging. I left feeling uplifted. Neither she nor Catherine Spielman, Head of Circulation, have found the Québec government overbearing. In fact, they both thought much of the legislation was desperately needed. Because of the shifts in population, the French collection is larger and more prominent, and they are glad about that. Jerilyn is from Ontario and she is excited to be living and working in Québec, and feels the same way about it as I do.

So many of the people I have encountered on my placements have been like this; open-minded, tolerant, receptive to change. I’ve sensed this spirit so far, and it gives me hope. I’m happy to become part of this profession. And there will be some very fine people graduating in May to add to the ranks.

Side trip to Trois Rivières, through the St Lawrence lowlands. Snow undulated all around us, a world of shadows. The city slipped off the edge of the world, leaving only an eerie glow in the sky. Downtown T-R made me think of a wintry version of Charleston with pigeon-grey buildings hunched over the streets. Balustrades, pillars, spiral staircases, lacy ironwork scrolls. Yet clean and orderly, meticulously painted white as if deliberately camouflaged in snow.

Saw *Forbidden Relations*, a Hungarian film based on a true story about a half-brother and sister who fall passionately in love in a rural village. Despite the law, and censure of the villagers, they cling together and build a life with their two children. Very powerful – and uncomfortable.

## **Feb. 8**

Talking a lot lately with Nancy and Johanne. Johanne’s transformation continues. Every day she wears a new outfit or a new pair of ear-rings. She started going out with Andy at the same time she stopped hanging out with Paula Steinberg and joined our group. Some very dynamic change process is going on inside her.

We talked about marriage on the bus. She and Andy are going downtown to look at rings. He is serious about wanting to marry her and he is looking to August, just after he finishes his MBA. Johanne is nervous about it – restless and uncertain. Marriage frightens her. She said she's not afraid of living with someone, or loving someone, but marriage is too big a step, too institutionalized. I suggested they just move in together.

Johanne's parents are already leery of Andy because he has already been married. Andy is afraid that if they move in together without a legal wedding, her parents will dislike him even more. According to Johanne, her parents are very structured and conventional. She has already gone through a long period of rebellion. Now she wants to be on good terms with them. Johanne enters rooms like the wind, everything about her saying "Change! Change!"

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Early morning coffee with Nancy. I told her an abridged version of the Me, Jim, Fred, Val, Al and Sharon story. Nancy loves to be asked for advice, or confided in, especially about relationships. She loves to be the centre, the one other people go to for help. She is perceptive because she is the everywoman on our group, going through what we all go through.

Johanne, Nancy and I have a lot in common. We listen to the same radio station (CFNY) and like the same type of movies. We talk about love and life and all sorts of things. The three of us met in the cafeteria again, talking about ourselves. Fred Merritt came over and sat down beside me, being quiet and undistruptive. Mr Alchuk passed by. His eyebrows went up and he gave me a significant teasing look. I could hear him say, "There you go – you can't escape!" Johanne, Nancy, Ellen and I went to see *The Big Chill*, free at Minkler Auditorium. It was nostalgia, the old friends, the bonds and burdens of the past, all linked together by the music. The Elrond group in ten years? It felt like my own past on the screen, my failures and melancholy exposed.

**Feb. 11**

Fred and I went on a long drive, all the way down Lakeshore Road until we reached Hamilton. This journey dredges us an almost lost period in my life. Before Fred took the *Oshawa This Week* job, he almost got an apartment in Hamilton. We visited that apartment building, prowled through the halls, walked up the stairs, living out what could have been, or what may be happening on a different dimension. The apartment is old and dark with food smells, like Somerled and the complete opposite of the Whiteoaks building. Then to Burlington where we drove around the parking lot of the newspaper office where Fred had parked the moving van, and it had been eventually towed away. I had made my way there on the Go bus and met Fred at the bus terminal – completely by fluke. Must admit to being fascinated by the what-might-have-beens.

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Ride home from school with Andrea. Pouring rain. Andrea told me that Mikiko separated from her husband and is planning to go back to Japan in July. She hasn't been to Japan in ten years and doesn't know how she will make out. But her parents are there, and now that the marriage has come apart, she has no one to turn to here. Apparently her husband is a very violent man.

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Nancy and I arrived at school the same time this morning, and discovered we were both dressed up. She wore bright spring blue and I was in brown and orange, Halloweeny pumpkin colours. She is the bridge between all the disparate members of this group. The missing link, the balm or oil between us. Her father cut off his finger last night and she was upset about it. Like me, she is frightened at the thought of ever losing part of her body, part of herself. She loves her dad and talks about him with easy spontaneous joy. I am envious. She is going to bake him a tin of cookies to show him she is thinking of him. She is so kind to those who are hurt, those who need it most.

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On the bus with Mr Alchuk. We talked about the speeches taking place in his and Mrs Weihs's classes. He seemed to need reassurance that the two classes are not overlapping. He needs to be thought of as important, indispensable. When the speakers come, he will interject a question or an anecdote so we will be aware that he is part of this, that this is his world and his people. I love how he runs downstairs to get the coffee and accompanies them out after the speech is over.

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I like Karen Cullen and her Management class very much. She is dedicated, articulate and engages. She brings out the quiet people who never speak out. They feel free to tell their stories. Maria Buisman spent a long time talking to her enthusiastically about something. It was lovely to see that.

Susan Chapman thinks highly of Ms Cullen as well. Sue, underneath that gentle, almost timid exterior, has maybe the best mind in the class. She is quick to pick up details, notices everything that goes on in the class. She always has something insightful or humorous to say. We talked about the three management styles and how various members of the class would cope if we were in a sealed room with lions charging at us. I said I would most likely close my eyes, plug my ears and when the lion was on top of me, shrug and say, "Oh well, it's too late to do anything about it now." Susan said she would sit there and tolerate the situation, telling herself, "Well, it's really not all that bad. There are lots worse predicaments to be in after all." We agreed that Karen Cullen would look the lion in the eye, crinkle her nose and say, "Can't we talk about this? Surely we can come to some agreement ..."

## **Feb. 17**

Kingston a real break from boarding-school (Seneca). Sharon and I talked all the way down. Wheeze answered the door in oversized men's pyjamas, laundry piled all over the living room. A welcome change from all the conventional spotless houses in Toronto. We poured ourselves wine, put our feet up and talked, talked talked.

Diane Koen dropped in to show off her new car. Although she came in and made herself at home there was constraint between her and Marsha. Diane's eyes kept shifting away from Marsha's face. Diane perked and bubbled, her expression rabbit, flitting from face to face, a gust of windy warmth. As soon as you start to respond, she has already ricocheted to the next person, perking and bubbling, leaving you with nothing.

Marsha's friend Dave came to spend the night with all of us. He is getting his MLS at Western, and we chatted about libraries. As we ate Wheeze's Chinese food and drank more wine, the conversation became deeper, darker. Dave's father talks to imaginary partridges. We shared painful and macabre stories about our parents and laughed. Marsha's eyes were large, bright and deep in the candlelight, her nose straight, mouth small. She looks medieval in the light, someone from another century. Luminous and poignant. Family photos now sit on her living room table. Her father, step-mother/aunt, Derek and DonnaLee. It seems she is no longer estranged from them.

Went to the theatre and then to Copper's, where we were joined by Diane Koen with three other people in tow. She can't go anywhere without an entourage. At some point Sharon wandered off to bed while Marsha and I talked until 3 in the morning.

We talked about relationships, and the estrangement between her and Diane. Apparently Diane had sobbed and accused Marsha of not paying any attention to her. I mentioned the Group of 8 and how Ellen Ryan seems to feel I'm disloyal to the group by seeing other people. I really do think that's the root of the constraint we feel around each other. Marsha always seems to find herself in relationships that stifle her in some way, with conservative people who punish her in some way for being herself. She enacts rebellion over and over, perpetually chafing and rebelling against an authoritarian parent. John is quiet and easy-going. Maybe this is a really good change for her.

The five of us spent a nice afternoon at the Scarecrow before we had to leave.

## Feb. 20

Nancy Dewdney's birthday. We all went to Sherwood's to celebrate. After telling Wheeze about how a confrontation with Ellen seemed eminent, we went to the cafeteria together for coffee. Ellen baked the birthday cake and made arrangements for the waiter to bring it out later as a surprise. She called us "the Eight Musketeers." It was a good day of real sharing and companionship. Nancy was touched by my card and stickers and I was gratified when Ellen burst out laughing at the card.

Mika is possessive in her own subterranean way. When I am with Joanne, she will come and join us until, curiously, I am on the sidelines and she is walking closely beside Joanne. She and Joanne have become very close. They are gentle people who suffer from a lot of internal stress. Mika talks to one other person and blocks the rest of the world out. By attaching herself to Joanne, she has moved completely away from the sophistication she showed at the beginning of last year. Mika, Joanne and I took the bus together and this time we were a good threesome. We talked and laughed about school. It really does feel like boarding-school to me.

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While doing my periodicals assignment I discovered a fascinating article written by Thomas McEvilly in the September 1983 issue of *Artforum*, on the work of Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

"... Through the openness of their personalities, what they regard as a shamanic experience began to occur; the desert became their teacher – and what it taught, they increasingly perceived, was immobility, silence and watchfulness.

'In the desert one thinks ten times before moving,' Marina says.

'The company of a lizard is enough – to watch its throat pulsing,' says Ulay.

"For several weeks they sat silent and motionless not merely for a few hours a day but for the greater part of every day.



“Anyone who has practiced prolonged silent immobility knows the excruciating discomfort of it – not merely the discomfort of the body when it is not moved, but the dreamlike and terrible discomfort of where one goes when one sits still; there is not a single unhappy spot of one’s own character, not one weakness of the will, not one hidden corner of the personality that one is not forced to scrutinize with uncanny clarity and at nightmarish length. This is a dark journey that one does not see the end of when embarking upon it, because one will not be the same person at the end.”

### **March 1**

Sherwood’s with Johanne, Nancy and Lynn. Walked there with Johanne and we talked about her, Andy, business, Fred and computers. Johanne is attracted to Andy’s energy, “his violence.” She feels she has changed a lot because of him, that he is having a dynamic influence on her. Said she went into the doldrums with Rob and let herself go. I mentioned I had seen a remarkable change in her since I met up with her and Rob at the rally last summer.

At Sherwood’s we discussed our relationships with honesty and openness, the kind of conversation I have missed from Elrond days. It seems as if Nancy and Dave’s marriage is on a tightrope; her idealism, his indifference; her always striving, his inertia. But it was Lynn’s turn to shine today. She sat up, her eyes shining, laughing out loud without stifling herself or trying to be genteel. She talked about sex and advised Johanne, letting loose like I haven’t really heard from her before. She said she and Brad are like brother and sister. He brings out the imp in her, and occasionally prompts violent feelings. But every time she does something mischievous, she has an attack of guilt. She is such an interesting combination of conciseness, earthiness and guilt. She and Brad went to a counselor to improve their relationship. Like Nancy, she is the one who is always initiating discussions, striving for improvement. She discovered at the counselor’s that she has a habit of speaking for him and finishing his sentences.

Nancy and I discussed the nature of love. She said that if anything ever happened and she ended up making love to another man, Dave would tell her to leave. We both feel that real love should be able to transcend this. If you really love someone how can you switch off your feelings so absolutely over one incident? Surely love can be flexible and forgiving?! And more certainly love must take precedence over the structure of marriage.

All these questions and more were discussed over beer. Nancy and Lynn left together. Johanne and I went wandering in a health food store before we parted company. Such a good conversation! It's on a day like this when I can feel hope for the future, thinking of all the brave women of all ages who are thinking for themselves, striving to be creative and individual, who question the world around them, the old values, what we're "supposed" to do, making their own ways into life. No, making our own ways into life. Hooray for all of us!!

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Went to see *Entre nous* at the Carlton. In scope and time period covered, the film is reminiscent of *Terms of Endearment*, but the former's depth, poignancy and subtlety makes the latter seem like a made-for-TV movie. *EN* concerns the relationship between two women who, right from their first meeting, feel something deeper for each other than friendship. The bond between Lena and Madeleine lasts throughout the years, through the crumbling relationships with their husbands and families. We see the women's traumas during WWII, the scars they still bear. We see them trapped in pinks and blues, lamps, chairs and drapes of the 1950s, the radio a constant refrain in the background. The character of Madeleine brought out a lot of my own feelings that usually stay submerged. I could love Madeleine. She had a profound effect on me – that slender poignant androgyny I can never resist. Elegance and vulnerability.

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Els Van Dam did her management presentation on body language. At one point she ran out of prepared talk and just spoke to us from her own experiences. I could never do that. She is fascinating to listen to. She is a seeker. Open and direct to the point where she offends people, yet also very private, highly concerned with people's pride and dignity and need for her own space. She is often depressed and moody, always seeking, learning lessons, questioning everything. And if there are times she is exasperating, there are also times when she will comfort you with her warmth or recharge you with her enthusiasm. I love her creative clothes, the colours she wears, her handwoven fibres. She has said a few times that before she was married she was a quiet dreamy sort of person, but her husband, Otto, was so authoritarian, such a "typical old-world European husband," she felt she had to learn to speak up, be a little outrageous, say what was on her mind so she wouldn't end up sitting in a corner, dominated by him.

In her presentation, she talked about the intimacy of contact, about what it was like to know someone as closely as she knew her husband when they are making love. Then she went on to tell us that one day when she was depressed and crying over a couple of terrible cataloguing marks, she went into the AGO and found herself in the Henry Moore collection. There was a statue that was all one beautiful huge soft curved all-encompassing shape. She suddenly had this wave of emotion pass through her. She wanted to start weeping and crawl into this sculpture and be enfolded and protected by it and not have to be strong and "endure, endure, endure all the time."

After the presentation I overheard Kim Jackson describing it to Johanne, who had missed it. "That Mrs Van Dam talked about having sex with her husband." Kim's face was red, her tone puritanical.

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Our class is becoming more deeply divided between the younger (Group of 8 and Fred Merritt) and the older women. Susan Chapman mentioned this one day. Els, in particular, is coming down on us. One day she told us to "be quiet and start acting like adults." Lynn Sinclair spoke up for the rest of us by saying to Els, "Aw c'mon mom, cut it out." Everyone in the class laughed. My group at the back and FM at the front applauded.

The business teacher, Mr Nourse, said, “Hoo boy, this is going to be one of those days. You people are really feeling punchy, I see.” Another bright spark in the Seneca College faculty club.

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Lynn invited the group to her house. On the way from the Go station to her house I heard that only Nancy, Kim, Ellen and I were coming. Lynn was hurt by all the cancellations. “To hell with them anyway – no, I didn’t mean it.” She has remodeled her parents’ kitchen and did all the painting herself. It is lovely; efficient, modern, no clutter or wasted space. Smooth clean Scandinavian lines. She could be a professional interior decorator. Her own room doesn’t resemble the kitchen at all. It is warm, a mix of the conventional and creative with a rocking chair, fans arranged above the brass bed, unicorn collection. I enjoyed looking through her albums, and she mentioned having liked Jackson Browne a lot. We saw photos of her wedding. She looks tiny and vulnerable in these pictures, made of porcelain. A tough fragility.

Kim’s boyfriend Jeff came over with Benjamin. He is extremely well-groomed, has an English accent. At one point, Kim and I talked about her marriage and why it didn’t work out. She advised us to live with someone before getting married. She is so full of contradictions. She can be so conventional, prudish even, and the next time you see her she will turn the opposite face.

It was Lynn’s evening though. She thanked Nancy and me for that afternoon at Sherwood’s where we had talked about our relationships and were honest with each other. I think we’ve reached a turning point with Lynn, that we’re more to her than just “the girls from school.” Tonight she was indefatigable, much less restrained than the Lynn we know at school. She played with Benjamin. She got on the phone with Ellen’s boyfriend Blaise, using her most seductive voice. She needled Ellen about her Catholicism and about never having smoked weed. Lynn’s tongue can be sugar-coated acid. Ellen was gracious. I heard tonight how much Ellen wants to move away from home, especially to get away from her sister Janet, who is a “slob” and “artsy-fartsy” - and that Ellen and Mika are thinking of sharing an apartment.

Lynn has a playfully combative streak in her. She takes delight in antagonizing people, making them bristle, then laughing or saying, “I was only kidding,” which allows her to step freely out of the ring.

Mika eventually joined us. Lynn raised Mika’s stubborn streak by needling her about how she would never move away from her parents, but Mika was sophisticated tonight in dress and demeanor, tart-tongued in her own way. She and Ellen would be strange partners. Mika so fluid, Ellen so absolute.

Eventually Kim, Jeff and Benjamin left and Ellen’s Blaise arrived. He is tall and lean, makes Ellen look strapping. He also seems very proper. He won’t eat anything with sugar in it because it’s not good for him and when he does, he blames Ellen for not talking him out of it. She was dancing and her eyes were bright. She eating, drinking and being merry and she loses many of her inhibitions when she has been drinking. Blaise just sat quietly on the couch.

Ellen and Nancy talked about their essays for Mrs Weihs. Nancy’s essay is on the topic of libraries of the future and she was bursting with ideas on how libraries would have to change and redefine their roles in the future. Ellen is doing medieval libraries. She frowned and looked dubious and insecure at most of Nancy’s projections. Ellen has a keen, analytical, pragmatic mind but no imagination. Nancy runs on imagination and inspiration. Ellen said, “It’s funny how you’re going into the future and I’m going into the past.”

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Went to the OCA (Ontario College of Art) for my special library interview. Once again, I am impressed by the people I have met in the “library world.” Richard Milburn couldn’t have been more patient with me. He took me on a tour through the whole library/AV Centre, explained how everything worked. Then at the end of the tour he sat down and talked to me about special libraries in general and how a special background or interest can be helpful. He mentioned Johanne Cunliffe – what a nice person she is and how well she is working out for them with her background in art. The thing that impressed me most about this excellent library is that it was built up by the librarian and technicians together, and their philosophy is that everyone can contribute their own special expertise. This is the kind of work for me!

## March 10

Montréal. The weather has frozen up again. Went on a quest for info on my essay topic on English Libraries and French language laws in Montréal. Searched for a while at Vanier Library at Concordia, then down to Westmount. Jerilyn Dietrich was there and she was, once again, so helpful and patient.

After doing my research, F and I went for a drive around the city. I wish I could be a designer on days like this and create fabrics, cloths out of the colours and textures of crumbling brick, old lettering and posters. Cement and charcoal greys with black sashes. Tunics of black and crimson, pigeon-grey skirts shot with gold. Clothes the colours of the iridescent cobblestones in Vieux-Mtl. Renaults pass by, the colour of balloons and bubblegum balls. There are times when something strained or just fatigues inside you drops away and you are left open and receptive, and the smallest detail is beautiful and profound. I wish I could be like this all the time – it's like waking from the dead.

Comfortable staying at Eric's apartment in NDG. It does not feel as if we are visiting. I can't comprehend that this is temporary. Went to see *Broadway Danny Rose* at Cinema V. Only Woody Allen can create a movie full of one-liners and urban prattle and make it seem so heart-breakingly sad and vulnerable. This movie is balanced between comedy and darkness. It is all about facades, vulnerability, depth vs the shallowness of worldly success. The pain of being sensitive, of being stripped of facades, worldliness and show business prattle. The pain of being real and alive, still able to feel. It made me cry.

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The apartment building just outside the window looks like a stage setting, a back drop of grey-black and red squares, fixed there while the drama is unfolding all around it. It is a stagey kind of day. It began with a blizzard, and then the sun came out, creating a fragile golden light, a Turner landscape. A cat leaps from balcony to balcony. Snow. It's the end of the world. Snow, as far as the eye can see. Just white and blue out here.

## March 17

Dropped in on Sharon on her birthday. All I had intended to do was drop off her birthday card but Ernie invited us in for tea and brandy. He was hospitable and we talked without too much discomfort. It helps when Fred is around. Ernie and Fred have common interests; short-wave radios, computers, all manner of gadgets and gimmicks. Ernie made dinner reservations for the four of us. When Sharon arrived and saw us, her jaw dropped. We went to Archer's Restaurant and the food was great.

Conversation with Sharon tonight was contradictory, almost schizoid. We talked about small towns in Canada, Kingston, and then she started ranting about how Torontonians cut up other cities and whenever someone states that they dislike Kingston she can't help but take it personally. She became quite intense about this and Ernie stroked her arm and told her she was getting upset over nothing. Personally, having been born and raised in Barrie, the smaller places cast just as much shade at Toronto as Toronto does at them. I think it's a pretty fair fight.

Sharon's sister Gail is tentatively planning to get married to a man Sharon has often said she dislikes. Ernie, who really likes Gail, is concerned that she is only getting married because she feels she is getting old and no one else is going to ask her. This sounds just like Sharon just before she married Ernie. She talked and talked, rationalizing Gail's choice, and I felt as if I were listening to a live cognitive restructuring session. It was fascinating to hear her talk in circles as if arguing with herself, and then convincing herself that this man is really all right – because we do not know the whole story, we have no right to say it could be a mistake. It's almost like hearing some form of brain-washing going on in front of me. All this coming from the woman who has never given any kind of break to John Futtit.

She talked about the people from her high school who always excluded her and made her feel like "a jerk." She took great delight in saying that they were not doing anything of any interest, that they're all fat or pregnant now. I'm sure the same is true of all my high school bullies.

My actual high school years have all but vanished – I remember so little about it. But it does seem as if I am reliving a completely different version of high school at Seneca. All the things I never went through at Eastview I am experiencing now. Groups, relationships. These last two years have been so immersive it sometimes feels as if I am at a boarding school. It also sometimes feels as if these experiences were all sitting around the bend in the road waiting for me to develop enough to catch up with them.

Do people ever receive what they say they want? Look at how ambitious Sharon seemed at Queen's, how hard she worked, always getting angry with Marsha and me for not taking life seriously enough. We brought her our craziness, our excesses, so she could look at us in wonderment. Anything we wanted to be, any way we wanted to change from who we were in the past, at high school, we acted it out in front of Sharon. She made us believe we really were wild and crazy, everything she herself wanted to be, and in turn, took from us.

In her last year at Queen's, all we heard about were jobs, jobs and finding work. Now her teaching career is on hold. She is working as a docent at Mackenzie House and married to Ernie. I overheard her telling Flo on the phone that she was thinking about going back to school, that she "had to decide what she was going to be when she grew up." And so history is once again revised!

## **March 24**

Mrs Weihs approached me in class and said in her blunt manner, "Your essay was very good." She asked me if I would change my mind and enter it in the Canadian Library Association essay contest. I gave in and said yes.

Susan Chapman, Liz Dille and I went down to Career Planning and Placement to look through the job binder. Liz has been encouraging Susan to apply for a job as secretary for the Joint Steering Committee on AACR2 Cataloguing Rules.



Susan, of course, continues to belittle herself, but she does have high hopes of having a chance at it. Liz and I are urging her to apply, especially since the resumes are to go to Mrs Weihs – and Susan is the best cataloguer in our entire year. I’ve seen a much more confident Susan and I’m sure a lot of it can be attributed to Liz’s encouragement and common sense.

Mary Maleki is the first one of us to get a “real” job – at Mount Sinai Hospital. It couldn’t happen to a nicer, wittier or more capable person.

Fred Merritt has been accompanying me to York Mills, any chance he gets. We have long conversations in which we analyze everyone in the class. He dreams of the class, obsessively, especially the Gang of 8. He is fascinated by our little band of young women. Sometimes I think of Marcel Proust and Albertine’s little band at Balbec when he talks about us. Today, just before I hopped on the 5:00 bus he said, “Je vous aime beaucoup.” I must take this seriously and not make the same mistakes as I did with Jim.

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Received a note from Rosalind. She is expecting a baby and the note was even more effusive, Victorian and fey than usual. Only Rosalind can use the most flowery archaic expressions and seem sincere. It also makes one tend to overlook how energetic and forceful she can be. She and Brian have been reading Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. She said she wants to surround herself with beautiful things; painting, poetry, art. Rosalind exists outside of time and place. I’ll never forget seeing her by chance, alone on the corner of Yonge and Bloor, a dreamy expression on her face, slight smile, a romantic figure if there ever was one.

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Val called. Apparently Jim told her that it really would have made his day (his birthday on March 10) if I had sent him a card. (Never mind that we had an understanding that if he sent me a farewell Christmas card I would actually say farewell; not contact him again.) His father suffered a serious heart attack and Jim quit school and moved back to Lachine. Val was offered a job at Redpath Museum for \$17,000 but she decided she couldn’t afford to take it. So now she has a \$21,000 job at the CCI in Ottawa.

Am I jealous? Of course I am. And is she still jealous of my relationship with Fred, friendship with Al and perhaps even Jim's adulation (her word) of me? Oh yes. And so it goes. As soon as I got off the phone I badly wanted to call or write to Jim. I miss him, but feel deep inside I should just stay away, let him get on with life, as I am with mine.

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Johanne's relationship with Andy is progressing too rapidly for J's piece of mind. She says she and Andy are opposites in so many ways. Andy took her out to look at engagement/wedding rings, and ever since that afternoon, J has been distraught. She only wants something very simple, but feels everything is working against her. She is going to have to fight every step of the way to get anything she wants. She also said he wants a ring of status to reflect the position he wants in his career. His parents have given them some furniture that J thinks is ugly. She was close to tears while describing how their apartment will look. Both Nancy and I have been advising her to put things on hold for a little while because right now she is being swept away, and not in a good way. This relationship may be too dynamic.

Johanne lent me *The Favourite Game* by Leonard Cohen and we discussed it on the bus. We were both struck by the duality between the negativity of the book and the beautiful language – the religious imagery, sensuality, consecrated quality of some of the scenes. I respect her intelligence, her ability to listen, understand. Her willingness to learn. Fred Merritt is right when he says that out of anyone in the class I am intellectually closest to her.

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Things have improved at home for Joanne Montemurro. Her mother came home from Italy, which means Joanne doesn't have to take full responsibility for looking after her father, who recently came home from the hospital and is extremely demanding. Also, her mother is letting J go to Italy to visit her very long-distance boyfriend Stefano.

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The weather has been beautiful this past week. We should all be feeling light and joyous, welcoming spring and knowing that school is almost over. Instead, the atmosphere just keeps getting worse. Resentments are building up toward almost every aspect of Seneca. We formally complained to Mrs Weihs about the Business (Nourse) and English teachers. She promised to change things for next year. Yesterday, tar oozed through the ceiling and dripped to the floor. The expression on Mrs W's face was priceless when she entered the room and saw that *her* class had become bedlam.

Another amusing moment occurred when Mrs Weihs entered the room to prepare the AACR2 room for her first year class. Mr Alchuk and the usual suspects using the room for study or waiting for buses and rides were hanging out as usual. As she started writing on the blackboard, music came in through the walls – a choir singing the hymn, “Holy holy holy.” Mrs Weihs looked up, a somewhat astonished expression on her face. She always looks somewhat displeased, somewhat pleasant, somewhat astonished. The only way we can tell when she feels strongly about something is when she genuinely smiles (a big wide lovely smile) or her eyes become flintlike, consigning the offender into limbo. Sue Chapman, Faye Zeidman and I started to laugh. “Divine inspiration,” said Mr A.

A garbage can sits in the middle of the table to catch the rain coming through the holes in the roof. Plastic bags cover the National Union Catalogues. The entire building smells of tar. More divine inspiration, I guess.

### **April 13**

Finished off the cycle of work placements at Whitby Public Library. This was my least favourite library of the three. I did enjoy working in the children's department with Liz Shaw and Joanne Alexander. They, especially Joanne, were very kind to me. Liz is creative and the department is full of little touches of her originality. She is one of these people who I have always envied, people with warm personalities who naturally attract friendship.

I found the rest of this placement experience rather uncomfortable. Mrs Weihs had already warned me about Circulation. She told me no one ever got a good review so not to worry if that happened to me. I really didn't find Circulation enjoyable, and the supervisor gave me no clue as to how I was doing.

Enjoyed Reference more. I liked compiling information on the Quebec Referendum and criticism on *Wuthering Heights* for high school students. I think I did a good job, although, again, I was given no feedback. The supervisor, Linda Evans was rather strange, and I heard innuendoes about her in the staff room. She has white hair and a young face. She appears pleasant in front of the public, but it didn't take long to discover that she makes no personal contact. She has a repertoire of smiles, gestures and comments that never vary for anyone. Her face may not reveal much, but she incessantly twists her hair. Her movements are flighty and she talks breathlessly. Quick, often unfinished phrases. On one of the 1-9 pm shifts, I almost blundered into the staff room. She was sitting alone, her eyes dark, mouth drawn, the complete opposite to the image she presents to the public. I caught myself in time and slipped out of the room before it got really awkward.

I may not do as well on this placement, but I have learned a lot. I now have an idea where my strengths and weaknesses lie, what I do have to offer. I feel I could be a crack Reference tech. I'm quick to pick up on people, what sort of information they want, what level they're looking for. I have a real desire to help people. Most of all, I have the ability to learn. I learn from everything I do, everyone I meet, everywhere I go. Surely that has to be huge plus in this career! I will say this to Mrs Weihs if I need to defend myself.

## **April 20**

Went to Orillia to drop something off at the Professor and Ron's house, only to discover it is up for sale. A small child answered the door and I feared Janet and Ron no longer lived there – they had left with no forwarding address. But Ron appeared and invited us in. The house seemed strange and desolate, with their furniture removed and all the Professor's beautiful decorations gone.

I'm hoping this means they're moving to the smaller more old-fashioned kind of house Janet wanted. This is Ron's house, really. Although it was beautifully decorated and immaculate, it was never hers.

When we arrived, Janet had slipped "out the back door" to visit her parents. Her weekend had been hectic with a lot of Ron's relatives staying over. It is always hard on her when people stay, especially when they are not all kindred spirits and she needed some time for herself to rejuvenate. We had an enjoyable evening and I think she was glad to see us as an antidote, "her" people rather than Ron's.

We went for sundaes and talked, naturally, humorously, comfortably. Ron's girls, Terri and Trudi have grown a lot. Trudi hasn't lost her intensity. Terri, maybe being older seems more approachable and responds to Janet's humour a little more now. The seating arrangement was rather interesting; the Prof, Fred and I on one side, Ron and the girls on the other.

We left in separate cars. The Professor came with us and our ride was transformed into an adventure. She talked about the people who had been over for the weekend, and at one point, said with great emotion that all she wanted was people to be nice to her. We parked on a country road by Highway 11, and in the car headlights, the Professor met her contacts in the dead of night and we drove off in opposite directions, never to speak of the moment again. I also found out something I didn't know about the Professor. She has frequently dreamed of driving a racing car, like her namesake Janet Guthrie, and really wants to go Go-Karting.

## **April 26**

Mrs Weihs's class surprisingly festive today. Spring has finally arrived for everyone. People were dressed in bright colours, light textures. The speeches were short and painless, although one of the speakers was utterly humorless, dressed in black, wearing a little bow. Nancy and Johanne did warm-up exercises. Fred Merritt dropped a cup of hot chocolate. Mr Alchuk happened to be passing by. "Take a guess who did that," Mika said teasingly. "It couldn't have been anyone from Library Techniques," he responded in kind. "It must have been Law Enforcement."

Kim arrived and said we were going to the Beaches. Lynn wanted to leave immediately so six of us, all except Johanne and Joanne, piled into Lynn's little car and headed off. It felt like we were in California, tearing along the Don Valley Parkway, windows wide open, four of us crushed in the back seat. Lynn drives aggressively, arrow-straight from Point A to B. We parked by the lake and walked along the boardwalk, three abreast, for all the world like private school girls allowed into town for the afternoon. It was warm and windy and the water was pale and aloof. We admired all the old houses, attics, cupolas, newly renovated wood and glass houses, converted apartments and townhouses that to me, point to the way to being a new kind of person. Nancy called to cats sitting on porches and they came to us.

Nancy's timing is wonderful. When I get really tense about school, she will invite me for coffee and be charming, attentive and warm. She is very intelligent too, though. She tries to articulate what she understands and knows on an intuitive level. She relates ideas to her experiences and her ability to empathize and understand other people's experiences makes her sought after for advice.

She wants to improve herself and refuses to read romances or watch soap operas on TV, not so much because she isn't interested, but because she doesn't want to be stupid or lazy. In fact, she says that deep down inside, she still dreams of the perfect romantic idyll, like the one she experienced on Crete. But she knows how seductive the fantasies are and refuses to succumb to them. The ambitious centered side of her strives for improvement. She respects people who can be individuals and are not afraid to be "characters." Nancy and Kim are alike in that neither of them ever gives up. They are both always "on," always feeling, thinking, believing. When either is apathetic, there is something wrong. Nancy works toward understanding and aspiration. Kim is impulsive.

We parted after hamburgers at Licks. Kim and I went through boutiques like Northern Mountain Trading Co and Import Bazaar, two of our favourites.

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Coffee with Els. We talked about the movie, *Being There*. She thinks it is a lovely movie, very deep and sensitive. I've seen it several times now, two or three times with Jim. It was so nice being able to finally talk about it again with someone.

We talked about Journalism class and Mr Holmes. Else seems to think he was a good teacher and I disagreed, citing the marks he gave our group as a reason. She started analyzing us in order to justify Mr Holmes's marks. She thinks I am bright, quick, one of the top people in the class, along with Betty Bennett, Linda Partington, Susan Chapman. Surpassing Marg Austin, Johanne and even Ellen. Els thinks I have a wonderful memory (!) She also thinks Ellen is more emotionally mature than I am. Well, Ellen seems more emotionally mature than anyone. No one outside the group realize how young and vulnerable she really is. Speaking of Ellen, she says she has always wanted to go to Egypt. It is the dream of her life. Always full of surprises.

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Our last day of Paraprofessional Management with Karen Cullen. She and Terry Verity were by far the best non-library teachers in the program. Kim brought in banana squares for the entire class and Karen said she has never come across a group with such a spirit of togetherness and harmony.

Lynn gave out cards to everyone in the class, which said:

"To my classmates ... my friends  
I'm sad to see you're leaving  
It's hard to break the tie  
Because forever is a long long time  
I'll miss that ready smile  
And the way you laughed each day  
I'll miss you very much my friend  
Once you're on your way  
Best wishes for the future  
Lynn Sinclair"

I wasn't the only one near tears.

**[April 1984]**

Mikiko Hagiya invited me to her place to see some of her ex-husband's art books, and to gave me a stash of books and magazines he left behind. She has no use for them and finds them incomprehensible. He left in January and she is having a hard time coping with her three children. She detests doing housework and disparages herself for not cooking and cleaning well, although her place looked neat and clean to me. She said it's the Japanese culture that has taught her to expect perfection of herself, and when she falls short she feels upset and guilty. She feels guilty when she picks up a case of beer because her ex-husband is an alcoholic and her daughter, Ryoku, tells her she shouldn't drink beer. "She's too good," says Mikiko, bewildered. All her family is in July and she is moving back there in July. Right now she feels she is at the end of her rope and she has had a nervous breakdown. School has been an escape for her, and our class has been a support network.

Mikiko says she has never learned to be independent, having gone from being a schoolgirl living with her parents to wife and mother; nothing in between. She is amazed by how independent Canadian young people are, compared to the rules and structure she grew up with. We talked once about education, comparing Canadian and Japanese systems. At first she was appalled that I could have gone through university without going beyond grade 10 in math, and said our system was too slack. I said that might be true but its flexibility is good for those who are not consistent. At first she responded sternly, declaring that it was not right to pass someone who had failed a subject. I asked her if it was a good thing to hold someone back who had talent in the humanities or arts, because they had trouble with math. Should someone's future be limited because of one subject? She saw my viewpoint and it was a really interesting conversation.

She faces an uncertain future in Japan. Doesn't know how she will make out running a special library, taking on a position which has been given to her by the company? She also doesn't know how she will adapt to the over-crowdedness and competition of the cities.



Interesting to hear her talk about her children. Her son Michiko is artistic like his father and is “totally out of control.” Her daughters puzzle her. Ryoku cannot memorize anything and this bothers Mikiko a great deal. She told me Japanese schools put great onus on memorization. She cannot understand how Ryoku can be good at reading yet unable to memorize her “multiplication figures.” and worries how she will make out in a Japanese school. I can hear the strain in her voice, and the refrain of lack of control. I only hope she has the strength to hang on until she is reunited with her people in Japan. Andrea told me her ex-husband used to beat her. I hope dear Mikiko will receive some peace and happiness.

### **May 3**

Joanne Montemurro is depressed. She is not going to Rome this summer. According to Mika, who is closest to her now, Stefano was all set to get married. If Joanne was coming to Europe he wanted marriage or nothing. Joanne says she knows the relationship was never realistic; it was just a dream. His relatives, who were expecting a summer wedding, cannot understand why she is not coming now. She has withdrawn from our group. Her laughter is forced and her eyes are dull.

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Went to the Canadian Book Centre. It was a lively joyous trip. Sat with Kim. We heard great talks by people interested in the promotion, publishing and distribution of Canadian books. Then went on to the Ontario Puppet Centre with the group who took the Children's Library elective (instead of Special Libraries). Enjoyed the exhibits immensely. Some were enchanting and I was so intrigued by how they worked, how ingeniously they were constructed. The little stages fascinated me, replicas of stages with curtains, spot-lights, intricate background scenes, trap doors and secret compartments for hands or rods.

Saw early marionettes from France. Andrea said she had thought of me and was glad I came along with them for the trip. Someone even remembered “the Waterville Gang,” a really obscure old TV show, where I took the names Dodger, Angel and Sharkey, for my own cut-out characters based on the show.

Andrea gave Maria and me a ride home. On the way to her car, she was fuming over Mikiko’s plight and the behaviour of her ex-husband. She has spent a lot of time with Mikiko. I found out that Andrea told Nancy Dewdney that I had told her about Nourse touching her. I was upset at having spread gossip and apologized to Nancy. Nancy said it had all worked out for the best. She went and talked to Ms Dodd and felt better about the incident. She said she hadn’t realized that it had bothered her until she talked about it. Someone told me that Ms Dodd used to be a dedicated caring teacher, that she put in the longest hours of anybody and actually even dressed nicely. I can see that. Right now, I think all she really cares about is getting to the golf course, but every so often there is a spark of insight or contact. She does know her stuff, has written insightful annotations on a wide variety of Canadian books.

## **May 6**

Visit with Sharon and Ernie. She told me about a noisy truck she hears outside the apartment and every night she incorporates this noise into her dreams and wakes up in the night convinced the truck is going to crash through the apartment. Every night she has to get up and know what is going on. Ernie calms her down so she can go back to sleep. This is the “night-time Sharon” Jim was fascinated by.

Sharon treated me to the ballet as a graduation present. The performance consisted of three one-act ballets, featuring 3 different sets of dancers. My favourite piece, which Sharon found bizarre, was called *The Sphinx*, and it seemed more a modern dance piece than a ballet – at least ballet as I know it. The setting, light and sheer creativity of the dancing made me want to see some real modern dance shows. The lighting was mysterious, blue tones with sunset tinges. You could imagine Ancient Egypt, the Book of the Dead.

During intermission we talked about in-laws and Dutch Inquisitions. She also told me she once wanted to be a ballerina. Her sister Gail took ballet lessons and looked pretty and dainty. Sharon said she felt unattractive and clumsy. She read books bout ballerinas and dreamed of dancing.

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Kim, Johanne, Ellen and I went to Nancy's apartment. We stopped on the way to pick up a bottle of wine, then lunch at Agincourt Mall. At Nancy's we gathered at the table and looked over our Paraprofessional assignment. Kim, Ellen and Johanne did it together. Nancy and I chose to tackle the case study ourselves. We both chose three topics that were different from the ones chosen by the other three. After we finished that we adjourned to the living room with wine and had a good talk.

Kim's new friend Jeff came to pick her up and I teasingly asked if they were passing a Go station. Kim suggested I come shopping with her and then they'd drop me off at my doorstep. Deal! Kim and I had a good time at the Scarborough Town Center. I enjoy shopping with her. She is quick and her tastes are as quirky and varied as my own, and I enjoy the stores she likes to go to. It also gives us a chance to talk. At one point Kim said she could dislike "that Johanne Cunliffe" because Johanne makes her feel stupid and they have nothing in common. I said Johanne was in the group primarily to be with Nancy and Ellen. "Exactly," said Kim.

Then Kim said something perceptive about Nancy; that when Nancy is alone with her, or the Group without Johanne, she's great, she'll do anything. But when she's with Johanne, she distances herself from the rest of us and acts cool. Nancy has the rare ability to get along with all kinds of people. She is the one who related with everyone in the group, yet she can be strongly influenced by them and take on their characteristics.

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Ellen got a job at the Consumer's Distributing library, first of the Group to be employed (of course), and we celebrated at Sherwood's.

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Called Val. She was surprised but sounded happy to hear from me. Conversation flowed tonight; about Emile, who is escorting her to her mother's wedding to "Mr Mallette;" about Montréal, which is her favourite city in the world. It looks as if she might get a job at Redpath Museum (McGill) when her CCI contract is up. And Matt came up from Kingston to spend the weekend with her. The re-emergence of Matt. He had called her, said he was lonely without her and invited her to Kingston. She went and Matt was attentive to her as if a year hadn't gone by. She called him and he visited her in Ottawa for the weekend. Relations with her apartment-mate Laurie are tense. If anything, Val is even more territorial than I remember from Elrond. Her home is truly her domain. Also, Laurie is "mundane," an ordinary woman with "ordinary female friends I can't abide." This conversation was full of events. Not heart-to-heart. The Val who called me last year to pour out her heart, when we had both ended up in tears, vowing eternal friendship, was nowhere to be found. Maybe this is a good thing. Tonight she said she never realized how much she misses me until she talks to me.

### **May 14**

After the Special Libraries exam, I caught the bus with Fred Merritt and Mr Alchuk. FM was very quiet and Mr A seemed elated. He approached us and said, "I bet you're glad it's all over so you won't have to come in like this every day."

On the bus we talked about moving. Ever since university he had moved every three years without fail, until recently. He joked that parents send their children to university to get them out of the house. We talked about how after a while moving becomes a technique. He advised me to not accumulate anything I can't lift. He said he bought nothing but rattan furniture for years. There is nothing you can tell Mr A that he doesn't already know, nothing he hasn't been through, nothing he doesn't understand and can't top. And he always has the last word. You can't out-martyr Mr A.

FM emerged to ask Mr A what he thought of the job of shuttling books to prisoners. He had talked about it with his parents and they didn't like the idea. Mr A was sensible and gentle with him. He advised Fred to go to the interview anyway, because it would be a good experience. "Ask questions to find out exactly what the job entails then talk it over with your parents and decide then what to do." And then, being Mr A, he added, "And anyway, who's to say they want you? Maybe you won't even get the job, Mr Merritt."

Mr Merritt was in a strange mood. He usually loves a good sparring match with Mr A, but he remained quiet. Mr A tried to provoke him into speaking because his silence really is unnatural, but FM withdrew further. So Mr A and I continued talking. He asked me if I would consider tutoring at Seneca College. I said I would think about it. We talked for a while about tutoring in general, then I asked him about job prospects in Kingston and what the Library course was like at Algonquin College in Ottawa. Fred Merritt had gone dormant. Suddenly he got up and left us at Yonge and Bloor.

Mr A was as surprised as I was that he left. He knew FM always got off at the same spots as I did. He thought FM was upset because it is the end of the year. He also said he had been worried about FM this term, feared he was falling apart. "There were times when I thought we were following opposite timetables and I would wonder – is it him or is it me?"

We also talked about the time I left my catalogue cards on the bus. He said he didn't know how I had coped. "Three nights without any sleep? I didn't think you were going to make it, the day you came in with the cards." He told me I had done very well on the ones I had managed to turn in.

All in all I was very happy to have this last transit talk with Mr A. It felt like a nice completion. I wished him a good summer, then said, "Thank you – very much." He understood how I meant that. He told me to keep in touch and let him know when I got a job. He was just always there for the successes, catastrophes, chaos, breakdowns, mishaps. Definitely my patron saint for these two years.

## May 16

Last exam (Business with Groper Nourse), last day. Flurry of greetings, best wishes, photo and card distributions. I took class photos (Groups A and B). The photos are actually quite revealing. Johanne is standing at the back, dressed in black, austere. Nancy is standing beside Ellen. Kim looks enthusiastic. Andrea is sitting front row center, the bulwark of our class, looking both strong and compassionate. Her arm is around Mika, who looks bright and lively, the good-time Mika we saw at Lynn's rumpus.

Reserved, rather intimidating Betty Bennett surprised me by putting her arm around me, kissing me on the cheek and telling me it was nice having me in the class. Also a nice send-off from fellow Queen's alumni, Marg Austin, who also put her arm around me and kissed me on the cheek.

Met the Group of 8 in the cafeteria. Fred Merritt came in and sat quietly in our midst. I thought he had already left and I made arrangements to leave with the group. We left him sitting there alone, and hurled closing pleasantries at him which sounded as false as they were meant. He knew it too. Nancy told him to have a good life. "Right," he said sarcastically. I hope to see him at Andrea's barbecue, although I am certain he won't come. I hate the thought of leaving it like this. He meant a lot to me this year and was one of my best friends. I have so enjoyed our long rambles and transit talks about everything under the sun.

The Group went to Mother Tucker's with a couple of people from Group A. Mika's father fell out of a tree and cracked his ribs. He is in the hospital and she was going to visit him with the rest of her family. Ellen drove her home on the way to the restaurant. The dinner was somewhat anticlimactic. We were all so fatigued after two intense years. Lynn had a cold and left early. I lingered and went shopping with Nancy, Kim, Christine and Paula ( from Group A). Eventually Jeff arrived to pick Kim up and he gave me a ride to the Go station.

## May 19

Went to Rochester with Fred, Sharon and Ernie. Sharon and I sat in the back of the car and talked until Niagara Falls. It was a cheerful drive, made me think of a TV show with 4 friends in a car with the window down. Ernie looked very trendy in his sunglasses. Apparently Ernie was apprehensive about us coming with them, to the point where he was going to back out, afraid we might be late or disrupt his plans. Nothing dramatic happened.

Such a drastic border crossing, a completely different atmosphere in the United States than Canada. As soon as we crossed the sky clouded over, the countryside became a little rougher. More ramshackle clapboard houses with peeling paint and furniture on yards. American flags everywhere; front yards, windows, doors. All the Uncle Sams in liquor stores.

Rochester is a curious place. By the time we arrived, the sky had cleared, all the trees were in blossom. The air smelled of flowers and grass. The city seemed lovely, a bit old-fashioned. We passed old clapboard houses with cupolas, verandahs, nooks and crannies, houses that grew so large they became Picasso-houses, a conglomeration of forms and planes. I imagined climbing up into attics, dropping into cellars, opening rectangular doors, falling into pantries, stumbling into hidden porches. A swarming honeycomb of rooms, spaces, shapes, textures, moods altitudes, all in motion, a restless, uneasy coexistence.

Fred and Ernie went on to the ham radio show, the *raison d'être* for the trip. Sharon and I went roaming through the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum. It turned out to be a large museum with several large collections. We could have spent all day in there. Sharon was particularly interested in plates and glassware, and could recite the names of various periods and pieces.

I was interested in the revivals that continually take place in American style and design. One of the most important was the Greek revival, where everything was arranged to look classical and symmetrical. This desire for symmetry extended right to the dinner table, when people started placing side dishes to create a balanced look. It also reinforces my conviction that there is no such thing as originality. There is no building, style or idea that hasn't grown out of a pre-existing idea. Everything is a revival.

After the museum we set off in search of lunch. Within the space of three blocks, we seemed to enter a completely different city. We moved from sunlight into gloom, large buildings hunkering over the streets. Two taxis almost collided. Trash drifted across the street like tumbleweed. Drunks wandering around the bus terminal. Parallel cultures existing at the same time, on a different plane than the lives that exist within the clapboard Picasso houses.

We ate at the Great Canadian Soup Company and Sharon talked about her in-laws, which sound even worse than Fred's family. After the ballet, she and Ernie had gone to his mother's for her birthday celebration, and it had been terrible. She complained about his present to her. The brothers couldn't agree on where to eat and deliberately disparaged each other's choices.

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Went to see *If I Were For Real*, a Chinese movie banned in China and Taiwan. It reminded me a lot of the Hungarian film *Forbidden Relations*. The protagonists were workers and the movie was filmed in murky greys, greens. Sea-greys, green claybank river walls. The movie portrayed injustice, hardships borne by people who lack the privileges granted those with important fathers. Then there are the obsequious government officials who are corrupt and break all their own rules. This movie was ever starker and more graphic than *Forbidden*, the drama darker and bloodier, the distinction between rich and poor, privileged and "out-of-caste" even more sharply delineated.

The dreams of Li and Ming Hua are offset by the reality of beating, violence and injustice almost inconceivable to someone raised in Canada. Li, the protagonist, finds himself impersonating the son of the top government official. He is caught in a web of deceit that closes around him like inexorable destiny. It is hard to conceive of a life with no hope, and as he manages to fool all the officials he comes in contact with, you start feeling hope that he and Ming Hua will survive and prevail. This hope is bolstered by the cruelly happy music.



As soon as “his father” enters the room, after driving up in a long black limousine with flags, you know Li’s dream will never come true. This man, a shrunken husk in an oversized coat, with the hard face and wounded eyes of one who used to have ideals and can understand everything Li says to him, haunted me. In a way, his backhanded revenge against Li is revenge on life, an attack on his former life, an idealist who might had had enough conviction to try changing his life as Li did. The man follows the letter of the law because that is all he has left.

Li is arrested because he is “not for real.” He is a nobody. His father is not important so Li does not exist. All that mattered to society was his fake privileged identity. Li is handed a mirror. He sees himself as he really is, smashes the mirror and slashes his wrists. Because he is not real. He was only real under an unreal identity.

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Saw *Diva*, a Jean-Jacques Beineix film. A thriller with twists, turns, suspense, but also a deep rich beautiful movie. I could see this movie at least twice, once to follow the plot and once just to immerse myself in the photography. Scenes shimmered in light, gold, violet, shades of blue. Faces surrounded by flames, seen in mirrors, through the reflections of sunglasses, panes of murky glass. We are taken to places by the movie. We enter dark garrets in Paris, Metro stations, the Arc de Triomphe. A white Citroen glides through the bois in moonlight. A lighthouse. Characters created out of lighting and images, come together in a dream.

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Marianne Hauser’s book, *The Talking Room* is a wonderful surreal book made up of superimpositions, characters who enter and leave, dreams, flashbacks which are all as mysterious and on-going as the messages that crackle out of B’s transistor radio. Telegrams, staccato, static in the night, ship-to-shore, rooms which reverberate with sound.

### June 3

Went to see *Entre Nous* for the second time, at the Fox Repertory Cinema in the Beaches. I could go a third time just to gaze at the woman who plays Madeleine (Miou-Miou). After the movie I wandered through the Beaches, past beautiful houses, carefully tended wilderness gardens. It was twilight, cool and warm, light and dark, boundaries dissolved. The air is lilac scented, purple and green. Pink blossoms against a darkness just beginning to gather force.

### June 5

Went into Seneca with Fred to check the job binder. Just as we pulled up in front of the school, there was Fred Merritt. He was delighted to see me and he looked good, better rested, healthier. Bright and clear-eyed, the shadows of last term dissipated. He hasn't seen anyone in class for a while and he rattled on, ebullient. Unfortunately, he still has to redo the idiotic A-V manual test, as Rushton seems to be using him as a scapegoat to prove to Mrs Weihs he has the power to pass or fail her LIT students. FM's parents have entered the fray. They do not feel the situation is fair and have gone to speak to Mrs Weihs about it. I am really happy that FM has that support. I am sure Rushton targeted FM as a vulnerable scapegoat.

Fred (FVD)'s car was towed away. FM accompanied us on the bus and guided us to the towing company. It was almost fun wending our way past car wreckage places, compounds, towing companies, dealerships, back entrances to warehouses with chained dogs leaping at fences. FM was at his cheerful best. We talked about "final days" and future prospects. He's applied for the same jobs I have and has received the same responses. And I needn't have felt badly on the last day because he had been very tired and figured I'd be going out with the Group anyway.

Fred gave FM a ride to a convenient subway station then we swooped through the area where Jim's sister Suzy and her family live. Since there has been no communication between Jim and me, I have heard nothing about his sisters – a whole universe closed off.

## June 16

Went to Andrea's farm for a class barbecue. I went with Kim, Jeff, Benjamin, Norma McNaught and her two sons. When we arrived, Andrea came out to greet us. She told me it was good to see me. She embraced me and said, "God bless you." Andrea was our strength and bulwark this year. She must have had a special relationship with every person in the class. Ellen was there, sitting on the sidelines with Blaise. I think he isolates her. Actually our whole group was isolated from each other, and there was very little interaction between us.

Lynn came with Brad. He is personable, quick with a smile and a joke. Had a nice talk with Lynn. For some reason, we started looking at each other's hands. These things happen with Lynn. We often talk about astrology or fortune-telling. She asked if I was part Indian because I am so much darker skinned than she is. She is fascinated by my palms because they are covered with deep lines. My hands look as if they are a hundred years old.

Susan Chapman has transformed. She has regained some confidence and no wonder. Her achievements have been stellar. She won the CLA essay contest and she was the top cataloguer in the class. Her hair was cut and frosted and she wore a purple print Indian dress with bare legs and sandals. Her humour is still self-deprecatory. She grimaces, mugs, backs away from the camera, but it has been lovely to see her blossom over these two years.

Also nice to see Sharon Cooper in a relaxed setting. She has just returned from Florida and already her brutish father is exhorting her to get a job. I remember her horrible stories at school, him screaming at her, saying he would kill her when she got home from late nights she spent at school working on her cataloguing cards. But when she's relaxed, she is endearing. She listens, takes people very serious, is always trying to be helpful. We embraced warmly. I'm glad she felt that way about me - my heart goes out to her.

Mikiko came and we, at least those of us who got to know her, were very glad to see her. She looked less distraught than when I last spoke to her. Less than a month until her return to Japan. The company is sending everyone back to Japan and Mikiko will be on the plane with her abusive ex-husband. Her two little girls, both in pretty dresses, attached themselves to Andrea. They did not want to leave the farm.

Mika and Joanne were there together. Mika has wrapped her insular cloak around Joanne and J feels safe there. They walk together, absorbed in themselves, almost like lovers or twins. The afternoon deepened into evening and everyone started leaving. Andrea walked me to Jeff's car with her arm around me. She said she hoped that when I became famous I would remember "what's-her-name."

I may never see these friends and companions again, but I have done things over the past two years I never thought I could do. I learned I'm a good speaker. I can now touch-type. I can do word-processing. I took class photos. I wrote and illustrated books. I have a resumé I can be proud of. I graduated on the Dean's Honour List, thanks to a surprise A in Business. Basically, I learned how to do things and I will always be grateful.

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Strange evening after the barbecue. Watched Louis Malle's film, *My Dinner with André*. Impressed by a director who would create a film entirely revolving around a dinner conversation. Changes, inflections, accents occurred in tones of voice, speech, mannerisms. It was surprisingly dynamic and riveting to watch. It also affirmed the importance of truly living every moment and never losing to ability to feel and respond to the world

F and I went driving after the movie. We were alone out on the roads, darkness rolling like night-sea. I could have been in ghostly Japan, surrounded by spirits of the living and the dead.

## June 21

Fred Merritt called and we talked for three hours. He described the graduation in excruciating detail, then obsessively recounted Andrea's barbecue. After all this talk, he finally got down to business. He wants me to go out to dinner on Wednesday with him, his sister and brother-in-law. This little gathering was his sister's idea and I don't like the sound of this. History is repeating itself. I remember the long conversations with Jim and those sisters in Toronto.

I did enjoy hearing about the graduation though. Only nineteen people out of forty-seven showed up at Seneca for the ceremony. Even FM admitted it was terrible. In our class, the only person present who was younger than Irene Ennis was Sharon Cooper. It could not have been a more effective boycott if we had conferred. The worst of the worst, Nourse, Rushton and Giffen, gave out the diplomas (!!!) Mrs Weihs, annoyed at the poor turn-out, stone-walled the people who attended. Graduates in other departments hooted and hollered a la *The Big Chill* throughout the presentations. The library group stayed at the post-ceremony lunch for about fifteen minutes.

Also found out that FM finally made it through his A-V test, and he had an interesting talk with the best teacher at Seneca, Mr Verity. Apparently Rushton is being transferred to another campus and Mr V is hoping to bring in someone else. Mr V said the A-V department is a “real mess” and he vowed to make changes for September. It wasn’t until they got a group like us that they realized they had to “clean out the dead wood.” Mr V was impressed by our group, said we were one of the best groups he had ever taught, both in terms of schoolwork and in companionship. Mr V also told FM that he “gave a damn about his students.” It showed.

## **June 25**

Ran into Kim and Joanne at Seneca. We all came in to check the job book and pick up our diplomas. Kim was bright and bubbly, planning an overnight visit, a shopping expedition, our future trip to Montréal. She took my hand and flew me up to another placement office to the second floor. It was great seeing them both again.

## **June 26**

Warm welcome from the Wheeze in Kingston. Windows all open, apartment full of breezes. A lively restless night. Music and candles. Marsha served us peaches and cheese. We drank wine and talked about jobs, life, restlessness. She has risen in her profession and now has her own office in the Industrial Relations library on the top of Goodwin Hall, but still feels this can’t be all there is to life.

We talked about families. Her father spoiled another family reunion. She was philosophical about it this time, and said parents are just like their children and we should not expect them to be paragons or put them on pedestals. Just as we can't help what they do so often, neither can they.

Esther came up briefly in conversation as did Persaud and some other museum-piece Elronders. The past is always close to her, and re-emerges in every conversations. You never know what she will bring up out of her well. John joined us. Wheeze changed mood, jumped up and convinced John to take us for a ride in his new car. We went to the Portsmouth for a beer. You can see the scars of her past so clearly, the pain and ties of family, the unstable father and alliance of siblings. All the irrational explosions and terrors. Yet she faces life with hope and extends warmth and generosity to so many people.

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On the road again. Surfaced in Pointe-Claire village for Romano's pizza, then on our way again, for once going beyond Montréal. We sliced through the city and all I saw were rooftops. Our first view of Quebec City was quite surreal. At first, an ultra-modern shopping centre, McDonald's etc., but as we drove along it was as if I had been transported to Europe. It is a beautiful city, made out of rock. Buildings and roads sculpted from rock. Sky a peacock blue, aloof whiteness of a church spire, the borderland half-light half-dark of twilight where everything is a dream. You do not know what will appear before you in this half-corporeal world. We drove until we came up upon a row of cafés with white umbrellas which reminded me of moths in the dusk. Tode of tourists.

It's as if the city formed from what the earth or sea had already begun to form in the stone. Everything here reveals the inherent patterns already suggested by the fortress of rock. The narrow streets and stone buildings remain one with the earth from which they came, not torn away, but evolving after being touched by generations of humans. It's a city built to endure, where every footprint could remain imprinted in stone for all time.

It's also a city made for walking in spite of the steep hills. That may be because it was not created as an abstraction, torn away from its basic roots and textures, its organic birth, but retains its connection to earth and sea, the exposure of a city that existed for centuries in stone. The opposite of Calgary, which seems to be all calculation and separation from the elements. Here fingerprints leave smudges, feet leave prints.

The city spirals inward like a sea shell, a labyrinth of narrow winding streets, culminating at the Citadel, the Hotel Frontenac. Passed an embryonic building cut out of rock, a building that was never finished – maybe it didn't want to be separated from the rock. Walls, houses, fortresses, government institutions all joined, created from the same substance. New Orleans-style apartments with balconies and twisting fire escapes, lace curtains. Worn soapy blues, linen greys, the sails of the tall ships. Muted blues, browns, rust, ash, trimmed with bold red and blue. A world of nooks and crannies, stone steps appearing out of nowhere, carved into the street corner. Lopsided Utrillo cakewalk village.

We walked and walked and walked. Bicycles sped down the middle of the street. A policeman stopped a Renault le Car filled to bursting with people. "Why are there so many people in such a small car?" he asked with mock sternness. "Because we don't have a larger car," was the response. The policeman laughed and waved them through.

Best of all, the back streets at night; the softness of the stone, curve of the road, shadows, hollowed windows, darkened brick. Slipping by the concierge, stake-outs with cats, looking up at black wrought-iron streetlights. Street names on the backs of buildings remind me of the family names on ancient tombs. I keep expecting to come upon a Victorian-era dock and walk into a Robert Louis Stevenson adventure.

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The tall ships were a majestic sight (site!) with the Old City as backdrop. We had an excellent view on the South Shore and watched them come into harbour. Some dusky and purplish as moths, others straight out of Stevenson stories, crew standing on the masts. They came in slowly, with grandeur, yet are individually crafted with a delicate and intricate expertise. They made me think of ancient cities; Tyre, Sidon, the Mediterranean Sea.

We drove around Île d'Orléans, through a countryside made up of dreams of villages, old stone houses, sloping roofs. Family crests mounted on walls; crests representing "Normandie," "Mougins," "Alsace."

After Québec City and thirty degree weather, Montréal was anticlimactic; hot, dry, tough. Trash in the streets, murals peeling from the walls, the light as bare and hardboiled as a medical clinic. But we stayed for the International Festival of Jazz on St-Denis and Canada Day fêtes. Streets full of musicians, a bowl of café au lait at la Crosissanterie. Parachute pants, camouflage clothes, dreadlocks, fatigue jackets, safari shorts. Broken glass glinting from a balding corner. A warm breeze. St-Denis moving with music.

Stayed in Beaconsfield with Fred's mother (the Valkyrie). She welcomed us like a St Bernard and kept us up the rest of the night talking about the upcoming election. She continues to be antagonistic, but for some reason, this time I didn't rise to the bait. Even her usual bigoted diatribes against the French failed to rouse me. I guess after just coming from Quebec City and the festival on St-Denis, I realized how strong and vital the culture is. French-Canadians do not need to be defended against someone who is locked in time. Her breed of old privileged anglophone is dying fast. She is in a box with nowhere to go. To be fair, the last couple of times I have seen her, she has been less argumentative and more ebullient. Once in a blue moon there will be a spark of contact when her whole face lights up.

She has the radio and TV on all day and night. She is addicted to media information, to the point where anchormen and talking heads have become her friends. Television world is reality to her. She didn't go see the tall ships in Québec because she preferred to watch the coverage on TV. This way she gets to argue with the commentators and feel superior. She is forever in the process of arranging, organizing, sorting things in her town house, but it just looks more cluttered every time I see it. And spider webs!

Spent the night in Kingston. Painful to the apartment in Whitby on a transit corridor in the middle of nowhere. Received a postcard from Nancy Dewdney, who is in Paris! Hooray for Nancy!



## July 5

Visit from Wheeze. We talked about sensitivity, the importance of retaining our sensitivity and how it is the only chance the world has. She wants John to stop working at the prison because seeing everyday occurrences there hardens people, desensitizes them, makes them incapable of relating to other people with sensitivity. John says it does not bother him and Marsha is too sensitive, but she feels as I do that everyone is affected by their environments, only some are more conscious of it than others.

But what really concerned her was, of course, her family. The gulf between her and them is widening. The wound is deepening because it is not an open or honest break. Surface politeness is acting like salt. Her parents are slowly and excruciatingly cutting her off, behaving as if she no longer exists. Her mother does not call any more or send letters. She does not even tell Marsha about reunions. Marsha found out about the last one through her grandparents in Lindsay. The last time Marsha visited Lindsay she discovered a card signed by her parents, Marguerite, Martin, Mark, Derek and Donnalee. They are relegating her to non-person status only because they do not agree with her living with John, but her mother will not come out and say so, nor will she admit there is a rift. Instead she chit-chats about Blue Jays games. Not even her sister Marguerite will visit Marsha and John in Kingston. On a rare holiday without her husband, Marguerite chose to visit the brothers in Niagara Falls. Marsha keeps trying to be philosophical, saying that when you get older you have to start severing ties with the family in order to live your life and have the freedom necessary for that deeper life. But her family is so important to her, I know she is feeling bereft.

Went to Toronto and puttered around the children's bookstore in Mirvish Village, then to a café where I drank café au lait out of a milkshake glass. Vive Toronto! Wheeze then invited us along to visit Diane Koen. We received an enthusiastic welcome and we stayed for beer. She looked over our resumé's and was able to pinpoint what could be corrected, and suggested the best format to use, then we ordered Chinese food and Wheeze told us the whole Dave Persaud story.

I never realized how sad, weird and traumatic that relationship had been. It seems as if he developed some kind of love-hate obsession with her. He hated her because she represented an independent woman. This threatened him and he could not be satisfied until he could destroy or dominate her. Good luck with that, Persaud! He told her she was frigid, she did not have a woman's body. Marsha is very vulnerable about her body and he devastated her. She was insulted by his family, especially his sister (another sister) when she visited the family in Calgary.

We can only speculate on how he described Marsha to his mother. His mother kept saying she hadn't expected Marsha to be able to cook, to look as attractive as she did, and even expressed surprise when she wore a skirt. Wheeze said they seemed to have expected a "truck-driving mama with tattoos, who smoked cigars and swilled beer."

Another thing Persaud liked to do was take Marsha into his parents' and sisters' bedrooms and pressure her into having sex, and when she refused, claim she was frigid and "unwomanly." After she returned to Kingston, he tormented her with abominable phone calls from Calgary. Marsha had to change her phone number twice to escape these calls. It was Diane who finally helped her cut free of him. Diane invited us to stay the night, giving us her bedroom while she and Wheeze slept on couch and sofa cushions on the living room floor. An evening of emotion and revelations.

Coffee the next morning, good music and conversation. When we finally left, Wheeze and Diane were standing on the balcony, seeing us off. Diane went inside and Wheeze continued to stand on the balcony in her flannel nightgown, hair tousled, looking like Wee Willie Winkie, until we rounded the corner.

## **July 9**

Kim called. As soon as I answered she launched into conversation and it took me a moment to recognize her voice and acclimate. It was almost startling to hear her voice calling from a vanished world. We made arrangements to meet next week.

Nancy is back from Europe and called Kim. She is getting together with Johanne and Ellen Ryan. Kim said she didn't feel like going because she didn't "like those two girls much." I knew she never much cared for Johanne, but I was surprised to hear what she said about Ellen. "Ellen's okay by herself but sometimes even then I don't like her all that much either. Sometimes she's kind of snobby, like only wanting to marry someone who's graduated from university."

### **July 10**

Interview for a job I don't really want at North York Hospital library. I thought I would only be dropping off my resumé, but was kept for a full-scale interview including typing and clerical tests which I flubbed. Why does applying for a job have to be so humiliating? I felt artificial and obsequious in my Ms Emma linen suit, legs itching in panty hose. I was kept even after flubbing the clerical test. They asked me to wait and meet the librarian. I read old Maclean's magazines when Joanne Montemurro came in. It was so good to see her.

All at once the interview and tests did not matter any more. We talked and laughed. She looked beautiful in a flowing skirt and sandals. The librarian was pleasant, vague, non-committal. Later I called Joanne to compare notes. She had not even been introduced to the librarian, but she didn't really want this job any more than I did. Both of us are discovering that few of the jobs listed in the books at Seneca are appealing. I find hospitals incredibly depressing and hope I don't end up working in one. There must be something about our age group that we can't seem to find the right job, any job at all, or we're perpetually in need of a career change. Fred is going back to school, Chris Hopwood has been searching a long time, Wheeze, Sharon at Spadina House rather than teaching, Joanne. Poor Joanne is still living with her parents, an oppressive environment. We were not on the phone for very long when her sister started telling her she should hang up. "I can't do anything," said Joanne. "I can't even talk on the phone."

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Bewildering, unsettling call from Val. We were not talking to each other, but both speaking into some kind of space lying between us. I understand the changes that have taken place in her and her life, but wonder if she's becoming even more self-centered and insensitive to others, consumed by the need for her own identity. She asked me what was new, and I told her. Later in the conversation she asked me again what was new.

She had just returned from a working trip west and chattered incessantly about men she had met – a blur of indistinguishable names. I guess the vibe between us simply wasn't good tonight. I mentioned seeing Wheeze and how we had a rumpus. Well, this triggered Val's jealousy and she became patronizing, rather scornful as if this was something silly she had long outgrown. She then proceeded to go on and on about Sharon and Al and Flo and various Elronders, as if I don't know any other people, or have ever had another relationship in my life. Most of these Elrond names she cast at me were never close to me in the first place. They were more Marsha's friends.

The conversation started depressing me. Val picked this up, of course. But she exploited it and taunted me, saying I didn't need to feel depressed because I "always had all the luck." I had nothing to say to that and the rest of the call degenerated into a jangly string of meaningless words. We talked about me visiting her in Ottawa, but she would not give me any date, or clue as to when she might like me to come. All in all, it was a perplexing talk, full of static, misconceptions. Signals lost at sea.

### **July 13**

To Montréal. On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, also a full moon, we checked John Abbott College's Document Technician program. Fred decided he liked the course offerings, and the director accepted him into the program.

Then we went apartment hunting and found a beautiful place in NDG-Hampstead on Clanranald. The landlord and his wife live in the building and he obviously takes great pride in his home and surroundings.

They invited us into their living room full of big old pieces of furniture, gilt-edged paintings, a portrait of the Queen. They gave us lemonade and asked leading questions. It wasn't hard to tell they were fishing to see if we were their kind of people but we sat at the great dining-room table and signed a lease.

After we left, both Fred and I started feeling serious misgivings, almost a feeling of doom. My misgivings revolved around the feeling that we got the apartment on false pretenses. I smilesd, went along with their world-view and was completely artificial. I don't think we would have had a chance at the apartment had we been francophones. I do not want to be ensnared in colonial anglo-world. The portrait of Queen Lizzie didn't help matters.

They genteelly talked about their tenants who are all on first-name basis with "Uncle Norman." I would feel watched and judged. But Fred's feelings paralleled mine completely. We signed a lease yet left gloomy and depressed. Late that night we decided we had to get out of the lease. We discussed ridiculous lease-breaking schemes all night, but when Fred returned the next morning, he was straightforward with them. They were very nice and we had no trouble breaking the lease. The place is a catch – they will have no trouble finding tenants.

We found another apartment in NDG, just off rue Sherbrooke. Our landlord in Whitby gave us excellent references and we were accepted this afternoon in a cloudburst. However, while signing this lease we noticed that it is yet another building owned by Jodrie Management. The Phantom again!! The Desfarges were our landlords for both buildings we lived in first time around, and we didn't leave Lachine on the best of terms. For now we have a lease, but I would not be the slightest bit surprised if it fell through.

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Stopped in Kingston to visit Wheeze. We found her at work and discovered her brother Mark had also dropped by. She had been trying to reach me for a week about a library job at St. Lawrence College. She said she would love for us to be in Kingston and is doing what she can to help me get a job there. When we told her about moving to Montréal, she said she wasn't surprised. She said she simply couldn't see us staying in that area and she'd just as soon visit us in Montréal as in the greater Toronto area.

We met brother Mark for the first time. He was much larger and older-looking than I expected. He is twenty-four but looks more like thirty-four with a paunch and thinning hair. He looks like Marsha though, especially the bright brown eyes. He is high-strung like she is too, and vibrates with energy. He cannot stop talking and will say anything that comes to his mind, humorous, whimsical, teasing. Mark is also like Marsha in that he is very tied to family. He condemned Marsha for hurting their parents by living with John so openly and by fighting with them. It seems that her honesty and the openness of her relationship is what is really bothering him. It seems that if she only lied, skulked about or never talked to them about John, the family would not be upset. But as Marsha said, what does that do for her, having to hide everything about her real life? Mark doesn't understand that. Mark: the boat shouldn't be rocked, everyone should just be able to get along. Back to Marsha: John is very important to her and she will not deny her life with him.

Speaking of Johns, Fred's uncle John was hospitalized for hemorrhoids. As it turned out the hemorrhoids were not the real problem. It turns out that he is, and has been, severely depressed for a long time. When the doctor asked him if there was any cancer in his family he said no. Luckily Lynn was with him and said there was so, his father died of it. John shrugged it off and said it was not important. Interesting to discover this depression in the family.

Getting back to Kingston, May Fern also came to dinner. May and I had a good talk while cutting vegetables, although I was half-drunk on martinis. Mark was playfully moving in on May, in a goofy prodigal younger brother sort of way. When she volunteered to go to the store, he let his fork go clattering on the plate as he scraped his chair back and ran after her, leaving the rest of us in stitches. May found Mark overpowering though, and maybe we shouldn't have laughed. I keep trying to imagine Mark and Sharon sleeping together at Elrond.

Went to see the tall ships in Kingston. They have been following us around since Québec City, travelling the St Lawrence, appearing in all the cities we visit. Firehall for drinks. John and May were tired and went home. Mark was still raring to go. Marsha, Fred and I accompanied him to another bar but we only succeeded in wearing ourselves out. When we returned to the apartment a frustrated Wheeze sent her brother to bed.

## July 18

Typed out my covering letter and left it at St Lawrence College. We picked Wheeze up at work and had lunch at the apartment, with frequent interruptions from Mark.

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Back to Whitby. Spoke to Fred Merritt on the phone for two hours. I can't politely get him off the phone and so much of our conversation is filler. Besides, I always get the feeling his parents and sisters are standing around him, listening in on every word. However when "Mr Merritt" and I are on the same page our conversations are interesting and fun. He is perceptive but also dogmatic, prone to making great sweeping generalizations. He also never misses a detail and remembers absolutely everything. He didn't take my news badly; said it's in the cards that I go back to Montréal. He also said he would never stop thinking of me, dreaming about me and worrying about me. I will miss him, but I can't be his fantasy-girl.

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Sharon called and it was difficult to tell her the news about Montréal. She was much more depressed about it than I had thought she'd be. Wheeze and I had talked about her probable reaction, and Sharon was emotional as Wheeze had predicted. I was surprised because our conversations have been superficial, politics, local history, Spadina House, her social knowledge of people (which often comes very close to stereotyping). So the emotional way she reacted to our leaving took me by surprise. "I'm so depressed," she said. "I had really counted on you being close by and I purchased two tickets to the next ballet."

When Wheeze and I talked about the phone call, she said Sharon probably related on the surface these days because she had to; all she has in Toronto are Ernie, Ernie's friends and a handful of people she knows from work. Fred and I were the only long-time friends living in the area and we were a stabilizing factor. Sharon goes along as if everything is all right and fine, until something like this happens which completely throws her off balance. This happens all the time with the pendulum swinging wildly. I had forgotten how much she care for our friendship. In fact, I thought we were drifting apart with her seeing so much more of her teacher friends. I will certainly miss Sharon.

## July 20

Went to Barrie and broke the news to my parents, who were not the slightest bit surprised. In fact, my father had been more surprised when we talked about moving into Toronto.

## July 22

Chris Hopwood has moved into her own apartment now. In fact, all around me people are moving. I heard from Kim that Ellen Ryan has moved into an apartment nearer her workplace and is living with her cousin. Chris has the back apartment in a large old house surrounded by trees and it seems just right for her – just like our old neighbourhood. She has the frustrating ability to pull details of my life out of me without telling me much about her own. For instance, I suppose i'll never hear what happened with Gord Harris. She has a large framed black-and-white photo of Jerry and Pam Steingard on her bookcase. It looks important, ancestral somehow, especially in comparison with the small frameless colour photos of her family scattered about the room. This big strange photo dominates the room.

She is working part-time at a chiropractor's office, which she does not enjoy, and part-time with the young people at her new church (Inniswood Baptist), which she does enjoy. Finally after years of talking about it, she made the final break with the Nazarene and it wasn't nearly as painful as she thought it would be. She said there was nothing left in her relationship with that church to feel any pain. Bob Boden is still in Toronto. Chris made a few attempts to see him but he rebuffed her. She speaks of him as if he has gone AWOL; a deserter.

Our conversation was less intense than usual, probably because Fred was there and she knows she makes him uncomfortable. Or, maybe it was simply too hot to talk too deeply. It's funny how one of my most traditional friends believes in the miraculous, the unseen, in a deeper richer spiritual inner life. We may feel we're on opposite ends of a spectrum and sometimes her views seem rigid or limiting to me, but I don't know anyone else who so completely understands the words "driven, having a calling" or understands the feeling that we are being led somewhere.



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Good talk with the Professor on the phone. She seems harried these days, and a little frustrated. The phone call seemed to be an outlet for her. She talked directly about depressions, feelings she only ever hinted at in the old days. Her sisters-in-law, although nice, tend to patronize her about her cooking skills, which has always been sore point.

At Easter, she and Ron had hosted a house full of people, and although they were trying to be helpful, they all crowded into the kitchen, offering advice and putting everything in the wrong place until Janet was ready to scream. We talked humorously about being ignored, patronized, humiliated. Janet's humour is similar to Susan Chapman's, rooted in feelings of powerlessness.

She mentioned the cost of the phone calls, and I said I did not begrudge one cent paid for a call to her. She seemed to deeply appreciate hearing that and said she would hold on to that for the times when she felt she was nothing and that she was just going crazy. She and Ron are moving, though, and I think that's a good thing. Hopefully it'll be a new start, a place that is smaller, older, with more character, and more suited to her. Then she won't feel like a tenant in Ron's overly large suburban house.

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Wheeze called to tell me I have an interview at St Lawrence College in Kingston set up for 11:30 tomorrow morning.

## **June 24**

Probably the most beautiful drive we've ever taken to Kingston. It was luminous, mysterious, ephemeral. Light deepening the way music can, intensifying. A pause, an interregnum, an interval so still it could be the end of time. The ferry ride from Picton has never been more beautiful, cool crystal air, orange sunset, oncoming night. Marsha looked like she belonged in this night world, dressed in white with a blue sash. The apartment shadowy, breeze billowing the sheer curtains.

## July 25

My interview at St Lawrence was with three people who asked questions about every single point listed on my resumé. I smiled at them, tried to distribute my gazes evenly among the three as they jotted observations down on their clipboards. They seemed interested in me as a person. One of them remarked on my “exotic background” and said they had wanted to interview me out of curiosity if nothing else.

The only question that stumped me was the bluntest one: “Why should we hire you?” The man asked me if taking a group of fifteen or more students on a tour of the library would be difficult for me to handle. Yes, I do find the thought of that very intimidating, but my response was worthy of a politician. In fact, I said something that made them look thoughtful and make quite a few notes. I think at an interview if you make something sound vaguely psychological or a sincerely considered observation based on experience, interviewers will think it’s profound.

In general I don’t think I can reproach myself for that interview. They questioned my lack of experience, my ability to do routine work and willingness to stand back and refer Reference questions to the librarians. I think they liked me personally but I don’t know if they will consider me for the job. The qualities they are uncertain about are not ones that are really in my control. I can do my best to verbally reassure them, but this is now all on body language, expression, intuition – things I can’t really control.

Lunch with Wheeze at the Scarecrow. Later, we met her British friends, Eileen and Sophia. Marsha thinks the world of these women. Eileen is in her mid-forties and Sophia is a feisty ninety-two. Eileen has lived, worked and travelled all over the world. Her face is expressive; beautiful blue eyes. Sophia has had a challenging life. Her husband walked out on her when she was young and she provided for her children during the war, the Great Depression, etc. She is living history, having seen Kaiser Wilhelm and zeppelins in the sky. Marsha says these women are mother figures to her, especially since she lost her real mother at an early age. They have become family to her now, and she says that since she has chosen them they are more precious than her blood-parents.

After leaving Eileen and Sophia's, we stopped at a bar and Wheeze ordered us both Black Russians and we recounted Elrond days. She seems to have a great need to recount those days, especially her successes with men. She has been so generous and supportive. She called Barrie and was even going to call Fred's mother in Beaconsfield to track me down for the interview. After a few Black Russians, Fred and I ended up spending the night and returned to Whitby in the morning.

### **July 26-27**

Spent the night with Kim Jackson. Like me, she has been job-hunting with little success. She can be too honest, sometimes brutally so. At one interview she came flat out and said she didn't think she had learned that much in any of our courses at Seneca. The worst part is that some of her "howlers" distract from her instinctive, very real competence. She's not intellectual and has trouble understanding terminology, but she is intelligent, hard-working and extremely competent. There is something inside that guides her. She takes great photos of people, and has the ability to capture their real personalities. Yet if you were to ask her to explain why she took that photo, or even what she saw in that person, she wouldn't know what the question even meant. Kim just takes aim, swift and accurate. Too many people only see the girly-girl who bleaches and curls her hair, talks non-stop, always in motion, making people laugh just by the way she sees things. Too many people never give her a real chance. What is also not always apparent is her ability to pick up on details.

Nancy Dewdney came over. Both she and Kim were waiting for phone calls from prospective employers. While waiting for the call (that never came) Kim dyed my hair, which settled and dried into strawberry blond. Nancy is nice. When she found out I was only staying over night, she told Dave she had to come over and see me, since we hadn't seen each other since school ended. She brought over her Europe photos and was full of interesting anecdotes and observations. With Nancy you can talk about anything. There is no subject she can't get interested in. She will, at the very least, try to understand any subject and articulate her feelings about it. She experiences things directly, emotionally. She is competitive, though, and when she can't grasp something she feels as if she has somehow failed. Then she becomes chagrined, angry with herself.

Nancy's personality is protean, chameleon-like. She takes on the colouring of whoever she is with. She's a different person with Kim than she is with Johanne Cunliffe. She really wants this job at U of T because then she and Dave could both take free university courses at night. And that is another side to Nancy, her desire to learn, to improve herself. She said Dave loved Europe and he took 90% of the pictures. Now he even wants to learn French!

Nancy gave me a ride to the Go station. I hope I meet someone in Montréal like her. If Ellen Ryan was the foundation of the group, Nancy was its soul. She has the gift of personality. She told me to call her any time. I would love to see her again before we move.

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Went to see a German movie, *Marianne and Julianne*, a deep beautiful movie that touched so many levels, asked so many deep questions. The relationship between these sisters is complex and ripples far beyond two individuals. The eldest, Julianne, is the defiant one, the one who reads Sartre while Marianne plays the cello. Julianne is ordered to leave the family table, the classroom. She is rebellious and uncompromising. Marianne is a "daddy's girl" but she watches, listens and absorbs. Her idealism hardens into fanaticism, revolutionary fervour, while Julianne softens, yielding to the past, which is shown through Proustian flashbacks.

Yet she was the one who planted the seeds in Marianne. Julianne transferred her rebellion to Marianne. Marianne is aware of her debt to J, but deeply resents what she sees as J's abandonment of the cause. She sees J's compromise as personal betrayal, as if J had planted these seeds in her and left her alone to tend them herself. Eventually Marianne acts out what Julianne was ultimately too afraid to do. Julianne pulled herself back from the edge.

The movie was a sharp analysis of a family. The mother was shaken to her roots by her daughters, but there was something in her that resonated. The father is evangelical, thinks and speaks in terms of absolutes, black and white, good and evil. This absolute thinking became externalized through the daughters.

Interwoven throughout the drama of the sisters are filmstrips of concentration camp victims. The huge subterranean unconscious of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich is linked to the familial drama of the sisters. The shadow that exists as another dimension, level to these lives. How did this mother, father, sister bring Marianne into being? How did Germany bring the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich into being? To what extent are we responsible for the seeds we sow in others? And how much choice do you have if it is all happening on an unconscious level?

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Some music:

Jane Siberry's *No Borders Here*. Mysterious, enigmatic, magical and frightening. Twilight music. Echo and the Bunnymen's *Ocean Rain*. A strange rainy day Victorian quality to this album. I picture old black and white line drawings depicting Gothic mountains, seascapes, adventures in other lands. Memory of a book that had once entranced and frightened me. John Tenniel's drawings for *Alice in Wonderland*. Laurie Anderson's *Mister Heartbreak*. Haunting, sinister, makes most of my other albums seem shallow and inconsequential.

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Back to Montréal to paint and clean the apartment. Met Geoff Selig, our next door neighbour, who invited us in for a drink. The concierge couple, Judy and Rocky Gauthier seem nice. Rocky is full of character anyway. He knows everybody in the building and most of the neighbourhood.

He's a great gossip and regaled Fred with stories of what they all do. Fred brought him a whole stack of mail belonging to people who had long moved or who never lived in the apartment. Rocky grew quite excitable and kept scrawling "Moved," "Déménagé," and said he was quite tempted to add "Chalice" to get his point across. Apparently this postman is so bad, the tenants got together and phoned the post office to complain and he now does little stunts like this for revenge. Every day we stayed and cleaned we started off by going to La Croissanterie so I could have a bowl of café au lait.

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Back to Whitby. Kim called. She said she always wants to keep in touch with all her friends and hates to lose anybody. She caught me up on the Group's activities. Nancy has a job now, at Denison Mines. They are sending her back to night school – Economics. This should really please her. Kim has a job now too, at North York Public Library in the Canadiana collection. As we all predicted, she's making more money than any of the rest of us but the job sounds demanding and she doesn't know anything about history. Mika is back at Osgoode Hall. She is fascinated by lawyers and the whole law milieu. Kim even called Fred Merritt to find out how he was doing. He must have been thrilled to hear her voice.

A wonderful warm talk with Andrea. She seemed delighted to hear from me. She wants a job with the United Church of Canada and we both think she'd be perfect for it. She told me she was surprised I didn't have a job yet, I was so multi-talented. She said she has faith in me and is convinced I will be rich and famous in the near future. The conversation ended on an abrupt, disturbing note. Her son got on the extension phone and said he had to make a call immediately. Andrea smoothed it over and said she'd call back, but her family situation really bothers me.

Called Sharon. We talked for over two hours. On the surface it wouldn't seem much different from one of our usual superficial talks, but there was something under the surface. An emotion flowing deeper than the words. We will miss each other and that resonated on a deep level.

Two short notes from Fred Merritt, plus an article about how Toronto is becoming more like Montréal. I should have known I wouldn't have heard the last word. One of his notes was in French, exhorting me to write to him, almost an imperious command to let him know where I was and what I was doing. I sat down to write him a note - it turned into a three-page letter.

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Packing. Boot came to visit and of course I alternated between enjoying her company and wishing she would leave so I could feel free again. These two feelings never stop swirling around each other, which keeps me on edge during all her visits. One moment, a strong sense of camaraderie. The next, just wishing I could escape. This time I found her almost insufferably tiresome, inarticulate. And maybe it's because of the stress of moving and packing that has made everything seem worse, accentuating the negative. So often I have to simplify everything I say if I want to include her, and even then she will look dull and uninterested, and, at the most, utter some sound of acknowledgement. She never wants to go anywhere we suggest, especially for food, but will not give any suggestions herself, and I always end up feeling like a performing seal, doing backflips trying to please someone who shows no enthusiasm for anything. At least not for anything Fred and I enjoy. If you do find something she likes, she takes it as her due. If she doesn't like something she sulks and acts like a princess locked up in a tower. I feel very unfair writing this, and I certainly don't always feel this way about her, but this is my journal so these are my resentments and grievances.

It was nice to escape for a while to visit with Kim. Although Kim is so changeable, she is the most constant of the Group. I always know what to expect when I visit her. She made me a spaghetti dinner and changed her mind three, four times as to what she should wear to the bar, where we were going to meet Lynn.

While at Kim's Nancy called. It was great to hear from her. She was warm and enthusiastic and when she heard I was leaving tomorrow she said, "You don't give anyone a chance, you rascal! Were you going to go off without telling anyone?" She wanted to meet us tonight but had committed herself to spend time with her father.

Kim just got her driver's license and a second-hand car. She is edgy in the car and says she hates driving. It stalled as she was pulling out the apartment driveway and we sat there, Kim with a brand-new licence, and me a non-driver. She persisted though, and we drove to Lynn's house.

Lynn looked even smaller than I remembered, so compact, neatly put together. It is actually Lynn who is the unpredictable one. I never know which Lynn I am going to see. There's the contentious Lynn who will argue the opposite of every point you make, then laugh and reassure you that she was only teasing. She especially seemed to enjoy doing that to Ellen Ryan. There's the Lynn that is interested in reincarnation and hypnotism. She went to see a hypnotist last year. There's the Lynn that writes poetry and cares about people. The conciliatory Lynn that calms troubled waters with just the right word and tone of voice. And the Lynn we saw at her party, wine glass in hand, exhorting everyone to get up and dance.

We went to O'Toole's. Kim and I both hated it instantly. Lynn was only sticking it out because she was meeting a friend. We stood, wedged in at the bar, surrounded by people who looked like the Seneca cafeteria crowd. Our talk was mostly a hodgepodge of work anecdotes. Kim is finding her work demanding, if not outright impossible. Lynn's supervisor commended her on the great job she is doing and is making up a name plate for her desk. Lynn is thrilled because this indicates her job will become permanent. She told me that my life was so "temporary," and she couldn't live that way at all. She sounded exactly like an Anne Tyler character; same intonation. Kim told me that Nancy isn't actually working in a library and she is already dissatisfied and looking for something else. Nancy is a seeker with high ideals and expectations for herself and others. I hope she finds something worthy of her intelligence and ability to learn and grow.

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Hired movers to load and unload, and I am so glad we made that decision. It may have cost money we can't spare but the place was emptied and cleaned as if we hadn't lived there for three years. It's almost eerie to think we could disappear so swiftly without leaving a trace. We were very lucky to find Whiteoaks, but it is in the middle of nowhere, on a transit corridor. It is not a home.



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On the road. Trucks blinked through the fog. Between Brockville and Cornwall is the darkest point of the voyage, submersion, drowning, lostness, death before regeneration. Fred ended up following a car with no lights, the driver flashing the wrong signals to switch into the wrong lanes. He finally stopped at an OPP station to report the driver as impaired. We picked up coffee and the car appeared again. And F continued following this car, pursuer and pursued on the road to the underworld.

The first person we met in Montréal was our neighbour Geoff. He came and sat beside us on the grass after the truck was emptied. The movers talked about burning cars and friends who could eat beer bottles. Meanwhile, Geoff made witty conversation. I felt caught between two conversations, two ways of life. Geoff came to lunch with Fred, Boot and myself. He is urbane, ironic and witty, well-informed on so many subjects. His eyes are large and focus on you when you are talking, then he smiles as if you are a charming specimen. Yet his smile sometimes seems very tight. He is from Walkerton and is a computer operator.

Rocky Gauthier, the super, told us stories about some of the tenants. He also gossiped about tenants in the next building who have yard sales every Saturday, which are really fronts for selling pot and hash. "So all your needs will be take care of here, eh?" he laughed in his raspy voice.

Boot drove me crazier than usual this visit. I honestly don't care that much about Barrie, and that is all she ever talks about. Sometimes I wonder who she is talking to when she loudly repeats in an affected or dramatic way that she is "only visiting from Barrie" as if speaking to an invisible audience. On some levels I feel very close to her, but mentally, emotionally, she is a mystery to me. We never have meaningful conversations. In fact, she doesn't make conversation, only odd pronouncements, and grumbling and snarling at anything she doesn't like. I know she gets to me because I don't want to be like her, and of course I fear I am.

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Dreamed I found an idol on one of the streets of Montréal in the middle of winter. This was a large Easter Island mouai, but dusty scratched and neglected. No one else would touch it. I picked it up, imagining how it could be cleaned and stripped and finished so it would gleam of ivory. I picked it up and it was heavy and cumbersome. I had to hold it close to my chest to even move it. I walked through the streets carrying this idol while everyone kept as far away from me as possible.

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Met Fred's school friend, Dave Billeter. He gave me a bag of wild mushrooms. They were amber with a spongy yellow underside like puffballs. They were delicious.

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Later, just as we were trying to figure out what to do about dinner, Geoff came over and invited us to his apartment for a spaghetti dinner. I was playing *Silly Sisters*, the duet album by Maddy Prior and June Tabor. Geoff asked if I were playing Steeleye Span. I told him what it was and he said he didn't know this particular album.

Geoff's apartment is immaculate, lovely wood furniture, beautifully arranged, reminiscent of Sir Jefforie's place. Two large cats patrol the premises; Horus and Osiris. His friend Lisa made spaghetti. She was nice; very poised. She showed a detached mature sort of interest in us. At one point I wondered if she and Geoff could be Moonies. Later, when we adjourned to the living room, conversation became more relaxed and she lost some of that curious poise.

Geoff literally lectured her on Steeleye Span and he sent me to get *Silly Sisters* so he could hear the entire album. He is truly intelligent and eclectic but he seems to do most of the talking. He likes others to listen to his discourse on subjects. His shelves contain everything from books on cats, the zen of sports, biographies of classical musicians.

Sometimes he looks owlishly at us as if amused. Sometimes his smile remains on his face too long and I can see it become taut, wearing away right in front of us. He is also the type who will assume what you have said about something, and incorporate it into his own conversations. I was the one who reminded him who Maddy Prior was, and then he turned around and explained it all to Lisa.

When we talked about Ingemar Bergman, Lisa really looked lost and very young. She lost her grip, floundered in the conversation and was instructed the rest of the time by Geoff. This was when I realized how much younger Lisa is than Geoff. But although I truly enjoyed talking with Geoff, nice to give the mind a good work-out, it was Lisa who touched me the most. She said she used to watch Japanese shows on TV when she was young, although she doesn't know any Japanese and her mother could not understand why she was watching the shows. It was because she loved the costumes worn by the Ninja and Samurai, and she loved the set designs. Her mother used to tease her about actually becoming Japanese. This was interesting, personal and said from the heart. After the evening ran its course, it was hard to believe that all we had to do was walk down the hall to go home!

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Fred and I saw *Never Cry Wolf*, which was beautiful, humorous, depicting a vibrant, mysterious nature. The most profound part of the film occurred when the Farley Mowat character encountered the Eskimo who mysteriously appeared and disappeared. Those scenes gave me such a sense of reverence, something so deep.

After the movie we drove along Ste-Catherine and ended up in Atwater Park after a heavy metal show at the Forum. That park is rough at the best of times but positively sinister that night. People approaching as if emerging from an abyss, moving like zombies. It seemed like something coming up from the bowels of the earth like the Third Reich. Something primitive, archaic, ritualistic. They wore emblems and symbols on their clothing, black white and scarlet. Mistaking noise and volume for intensity, violence for feeling, rigid "moral" tales of warriors for imagination, the thunder of bass for the rhythm of life itself. The Third Reich lives on. People crawling out of a dredged seabed, evolving, developing lungs, taking form.

Downtown east end. A still-life of punks posing among brick walls, broken glass, concrete blocks. Just sitting with spiked hair, black leather, studs, ghoulish makeup, poised and breathing like iguanas in a desert. Statues commemorating, embodying the violence of an evening, an era. The air itself seems to reverberate with the lost, the sunken, glimmering of the tide engulfing the world.

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I want to take last night and turn it into some kind of story. Strip everything to the bone. Stop something in motion, expose the inner workings behind that confluence of elements last night. Start off subtly with all the warmth, colour and golden light of a late August day and then strip it down, distill it, as if the light has lasted too long and could burn out. Reveal the skeleton through the crosshatch of lines making up the structure of the world. All suffused in a shade of October yellow-gold, the colour of cat's eyes, the lines running through it, crosscurrents, roots pushing up. Hundreds of vibrating lines creating the world.

In "Ant Colony" or "Resurrection" I want a fairy tale tone. All the nuances, dreams, colours, shadows. I want to relate the small boy to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich, the punkers and finally the resurrection and the great flood that sweeps away individual lives, as if this little boy has tapped into something that extends far beyond his play with the ants, or his individual fantasies.

His fantasies flow into the fantasy that took possession of an entire generations. It was collective, in them, in this boy, in all of us. I want the story to resemble overlays where layers, dimensions and colours are added one by one to the skeleton until nothing more can be added. I wish I could write this like an image developing in its chemical formula, in a dark room, coming to life before one's very eyes.

### **Sept. 14**

Jane Siberry in concert at Le Spectrum. She stands stiffly at times, detached from the audience, speaking both deliberately and trancelike, moving her arm back and forth; a meld of shyness and reverie. The music seems to come through as if she is a medium. In “Extra Executives” she stood to the side and sang as if singing to herself. Many of the lyrics did not appear on the album. This concert was as mysterious and spell-binding as her albums. An encounter with the unknown. The ice floe breaks free, water thunders to the sea, night woods and dark streets. On and on, darker. No one will come back, no one listens, forgotten days crumble to dust, six feet deep cracks in a broken wall. Dark waters lash. Wolves howl in the night. Sleep in the snow or keep moving. Blood on snow. But if. Only because.

She has tapped into something and is as far away from the audience as she can be. Yet at the same time she has entered every one of us, bringing our own images and dreams to the surface. “Dancing Class” was wonderful. It was as if she was singing to herself; a wistful, quavery, almost tuneless voice, a child all alone singing a nursery rhyme or a made-up song to herself for herself after all the company has left and she can finally be free again.

Le Spectrum was the perfect venue; all dark with constellations of white lights on the walls. It was the perfect place to see her in person. She didn’t speak much to the audience, but before her encore she said she felt as if we were all sitting on the edge of a dock looking at the stars and so, why would she leave anyway? And that was how the whole concert went, as if we were looking at the stars, aware of the immensities and mysteries all around us. How small Jane Siberry seemed and how small we all are in a world without borders.

### **Sept. 21**

Went to Fish Creek/Rollins Pond in New York State. Beautiful autumn journey. We curved into tunnels of leaves. Birches zigzagging through deep rich colour. Ebb-flow of colour and motion, darkening sky, opening of water.

Morning. Sitting on the dock. Lake utterly still, mountains in background, rounded like wet blue clay. Orange-red pours onto the surface, changing water into wine. Decided to go to Smuggler's Notch. Passed Saranac Lake, Lake Placid. Clapboard houses, checked curtains, wooden signs, dollhouse colours, wraparound porches. Mad River Glen. The world is mad, a tumult of colour in a muted sky. Moriah, on the edge of Lake Champlain. Felt as if we only had two wheels on the edge of the road and the other half of the car was tilting into the sky. A whirl of blue-grey sky.

There is a wildness or neglect here that doesn't exist in sunny Lake Placid. Here there is peeling wood, houses that could crack open, a riot of dahlias and marigolds, European-like churches in brown stone with great medieval doors. Not quite as startling or imposing as the Catholic churches in Québec villages, where houses and business surround them like feudal serfs. But still, these large stoney churches are surprising pieces of Europe – what you don't expect to see in the United States. Across the bridge into Vermont. Rolling green land, a feeling of immensity. DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) State Park and mansion. Signs for cocktails and custards. The sky had darkened by the time we reached the top of Smuggler's Notch. Twisted trees, huge rocks, mountains. Darkness closed in around us. We nosed our way down the mountain in our submarine with the orange instrument panel. Houses stranded on the shores like starfish. More dollhouses. Chalets and small charming shopping centres made of wood. Telephone poles crest hills, sudden and stark as crosses.

Re-entered Québec through Clarenceville, a tiny crossing. This part of our drive made me think of Anne Hébert; flat, bleak countryside, grim stone churches, rough farmhouses. Black iron balconies and stairways gleaming in the dark. A sense of danger that didn't exist in Vermont, something elemental and impersonal.

## Sept. 28

Job interview at Broadcast Holdings, a small office deep within a small brick building in Pointe-Claire. Took the commuter train to Valois. I was so used to the commute between Whitby-Seneca College that I had brought an arsenal of reading material to pass the time, but I didn't need it. It took no time to get there. The interview turned out to be another where I didn't get any kind of vibe, positive or negative. Kevin Orr, who interviewed me, fidgeted and seemed distracted. I don't think he's ever interviewed anyone before as he seemed more nervous than I was. He also didn't have a prepared set of questions. He gave me a manual to look at and I told him I thought I could do the work. Couldn't think of anything else to say!

The office was carved out of two former apartments. The library consists of filing cabinets and a shelf full of folders. I glimpse a few people burrowing through various inner chambers, busy as ants. It looks like a play-office set up by kids. Even the desks looked like cardboard boxes.

Took the 90 bus back. It meandered through the West Island and into Lachine. Most of my fellow passengers were older women who resembled badgers coming out of their burrows, leaving their English enclave for a while. Steady babble of English. So much uninterrupted English is starting to sound unfamiliar to me. The bus seemed to cross an invisible boundary in Lachine and no more English people boarded. It filled with vigorous French while the English faded into silence. How abrupt the shift! This demarcation line seems to exist at the Lachine shopping centre, where established family homes like the Mills's give way to apartment buildings and then to the working-class areas near the Dominion Bridge. It is a fascinating ride, so many territories on this one long route. Complacent Beaconsfield, half-and-half Lachine, then sneaking through blue-collar St-Pierre and then Concordia University (Loyola Campus), land of the polo ponies and backpacks. You could never be bored in this city of contrasts.

**Sept. 29**

Fred and I went out to an antique flea market in Hudson. Ended up buying a great pine chest to use as a blanket box. We also met a woman from Huntingdon who will cane our two kitchen chairs for us. She was bone thin, wrapped in a heavy sweater. She smoked slim cigars and talked non-stop. She called us kids and thought we were too young to be married. She asked Fred where he was from, and she assumed I was Québécoise. We talked about how disorganized Québec is compared with orderly Ontario, home of the immortal Bill Davis and subways that look like bathrooms. She is fascinated by organized crime and regaled us with tales of the Gallo Brothers, who were infamous New York gangsters.

Val called at 11:00. I'm no longer used to receiving phone calls at night and it felt like a summons from another world. It was very much an autumnal conversation; wistful, nostalgic reflective. We talked about long walks we took in Kingston, shuffling through leaves, the playground in Pervert Park. I had really surprised her by our move to Montréal. Tentative plan to visit her in Ottawa next weekend.

**Oct. 3**

A real adventure – astrology class on St-Viateur! It was pouring rain and the streets were shining and I was venturing into the heart of the city doing something besides being a tourist. It was a small class, nine students, held in a room above the natural foods restaurant, L'herberie. The instructor, Susan Kelly introduced herself as “Samantha,” a medical astrology columnist for a tabloid. She's a Leo sun, Scorpio moon and Gemini ascendant. She was entertaining, humorous and really engaged with the students. It was a lot of fun and an interesting system of symbols. I'm also getting a membership card for the ASM (Astrological Society of Montréal). I think this is going to be a lot of fun.



## Oct. 5

Second interview at Broadcast Holdings. This time with the “big boss.” First I had to go through some tests, this time the fifteen minute quick-thinking type that tend to put me to sleep. I am not a quick thinker. Ideas come to me in flashes, but they take a while to sink in and if I don’t have time, or if I feel pressured, I tend to go blank. The boss’s office was much larger and more imposing than I had expected, and I sank into a big cushy, obviously expensive chair. The boss is shortish, stocky with a salt-and-pepper beard. He, Bob Jeffcott, is not at all good-looking but he does have a booming voice and stage presence. He looked at my resumé and said, “That’s quite a background you have,” and sounded frank and sincere rather than dubious.

He acknowledged my interest in art by mentioning Carson, the last living member of the Group of 7. He seems to have an appreciation and understanding of art and said he thought good art was historical. I don’t agree with that, but this was the most interesting conversation I’ve ever had at an interview.

We finally got around to talking about the library. He said he isn’t the type to be satisfied with a tiny library and he hopes to expand it to the point where it will become an information center for clientele from all over that will pay for itself. Thanks to Mr Alchuk, I was excited by the idea of running and building up a real special library. I think Mr Jeffcott and I understood each other. I respect someone who has enough scope to use everything an employee has to offer. I think he personally liked me and is enough of a maverick to take a chance on me. However, I did sense that he is enough of a pragmatist to know this is my first real job in the field. So I guess it could go either way.

Later I received a phone call from Cote-St-Luc library and arranged an interview for Wednesday. So if I don’t get this job, at I’ll least be right out there again.

### Oct. 9

Kevin Orr called. I got the job at BHCL and will be going into the office tomorrow to get the paperwork started. They start at 8:30 but don't expect me to be there that early. It is so strange how things just seem to happen for me in Montréal. I heard about the astrology courses only because I am on the Metamorphosis store's mailing list. I heard about Broadcast Holdings only because a classmate of Fred's happened to spot the ad in the West Island newspaper *News and Chronicle* and she doesn't even usually look at the ads. I like an expression I read somewhere, "Coincidences are spiritual puns."

### Oct. 12-13

Tried reading *Best Canadian Stories* on the bus to Ottawa. Most of them leave me cold; meticulously detailed with every twig, rock, sunset and brand of butter lavishly described. But so so boring. I keep trying to enjoy Canadian literature. Eventually gave up and switched to Robertson Davies's *The Deptford Trilogy*. This is rich, mysterious, archetypal, something completely different. While reading I pictured the moon on the dark waves of the Arctic Ocean, ice floes, the albatross on its journey. Looking out the bluegreen windows of the bus at a sky streaked with the same shade of red as the leaves. This is an instinctive journey across unmeasurable distances.

When I met Val at the terminal it felt like the most natural thing in the world. Val looked more like Val than any of the startling Vals I met in Toronto or Montréal. Here, she looked so familiar, as if no time had passed since our Elrond days. Her new apartment is labyrinthine, full of oddly placed doors, fascinating antique objects that could only belong to her. Although she and her friend Laurie share the apartment, it is all Val. Laurie's sole contributions seem to be a plush couch and TV. Sat with Val on her bed listening to music, candles glowing, an antique Japanese doll with a white face glowing like the moon. Shadows of antique lamps, hats. We were drinking Pernod and then she lit into me about the Sharon-Al-Jim-me conspiracy. She wanted to know "the truth" and expressed her anger towards me for the "pivotal part I played." I don't know what Jim said to her, what he could possibly know that hadn't been revealed a long time ago.

All I know was this was just like a scene out of *The Deptford Trilogy* and I was more fascinated than upset. The scene was so much like the one in the book of David shouting at the magic show, “Who killed Boy Staunton?” I so wanted to quote the Charmed Head at Val: “It was a cabal of four: herself, the woman she did not know, the man she did know and the keeper of the stone, Fifth Business. Fifth Business being those roles, which, being neither those of Hero or Heroine, Confidante nor Villain, but which were nonetheless essential to bring about the Recognition or denouement, were called the Fifth Business in drama and opera companies organized according to the old style; the player who acted these parts was often referred to as Fifth Business.”

I think what Val needs is to go on a symbolic journey, much like David’s in the book because she cannot let this go. To her, we are not just some young people who became embroiled in a bit of dramatic nastiness. My crime seems to be not taking Val’s side over Sharon’s in the love triangle. Marsha never took sides either yet I seem to have become the villain. In fact, we all seem to have become archetypal figures, symbols whose meanings or roles extend far beyond our individual foibles. She is never going to let this go until she goes deep within herself to examine this story that has possessed her. She won’t get anything out of me – I have nothing more to give.

But I do find some fascinating parallels between this story and the Deptford Trilogy. First there is Val, Herself, acting, reacting, the person who “does and is done to.” Done for? Undoing? Secondly, there is the man she knew: Al. And she did know his deepest self at one time. Thirdly, there is the woman she never knew: Sharon. None of us knew what Sharon was capable of. I didn’t live with Sharon, I never knew a thing about the men she pursued until Marsha told me. Sharon always wanted what everyone else had, especially their men. On the other hand, the Val-Al relationship had become toxic. If anything I was siding with Al.

Then there was Fifth Business: the friend, the one who always seemed to be around, the shadow figure who connected all the points, the connector in the model of the atom. The friend who claims to do good but creates chaos. Although I can see a bit of myself in that, I strongly feel that Jim Mills was the real Fifth Business.

He was always in the background, a shadowy figure receiving confidences from everyone, sowing division and chaos. I think I was just too hurt and confused to be a Fifth Business. You need someone a lot more detached and manipulative than me for that role.

Val and I went to the market and listened to a trio of buskers play everything from Merle Haggard to CSN&Y. They were singing and playing their hearts out and the crowd that gathered was nice. A very drunk woman danced jigs and pulled men out to dance with her. She was not whimsical or playful, though. Her eyes were glazed and she didn't appear to be getting any enjoyment from the music. The crowd was nice to her though. No ugliness. The men she mostly laughed but she managed to entice a few to dance with her. Val and I always find these musicians, almost like court troubadours. I'll never forget that time in Old Montréal when we sat on the curb listening to a guitar player.

I like Ottawa; I like this market. The city has such a reputation for being dull civil service land, but I've always found it exciting and artistic. I also like the bilingualism and the presence of two dynamic languages. In Montréal, English culture is moribund. Surely there must be more than *the Gazette*, CHOM-FM, FM 96, Aislin, The Mansfield Book Mart, all of which have this whiny undertone and resistance to anything new. Where is the new music, writing, art? Not in English!

Val and I alternated between old and new selves; nostalgia and talk of new beginnings. We returned to her place, sat in the living room with candles glowing and she told me she had been pregnant and miscarried. The father would have been Glen. Sunday, we were in a dreamy state and went to a doll festival. More deep talks, a true give-and-take. Maybe we can be real friends again rather than two ships in the night occasionally sending signals to each other.

### **Oct. 15**

Went to see Fred's Oma after work. She is staying with his mother in Beaconsfield. Oma is lively and spry with bright blue eyes and an expressive face. Yet in repose, her expression becomes searching and solemn, the exact opposite of the "foolish old woman" persona she likes to project.

You can almost see the shadow pass over her face. It's hard to describe. It's a confused or bemused expression, something of always being aware of the responsibility of life, wisdom coming from hard experience. She once wrote in a letter that she is not naturally open and has learned through life that is better to be open.

Oma is so much more sophisticated, both intellectually and emotionally, than the rest of Fred's family. While I was in Ottawa she visited Fred at our apartment. She saw some of my pastels on the wall and told him how much she liked them, and that she thought I had a lot of talent. She told me the same thing tonight.

Fred went to help his mother with something so Oma and I talked alone. She was intimate and talked to me about her daughter, how Marria is too closed in her feelings. Oma could sense that her three sons are the most important thing in her life but she can never express it in words, so it looks as if she doesn't have such strong feelings. Oma said that she (Oma) always asks questions; questions, questions, questions, and Marria gets very upset and obstinate, closing right up when she is questioned. Oh yes, I have seen this. In fact, it does sometimes seem as if Oma goads Marria. Then she told me she had had a special feeling about Fred and me as a couple when she first met me.

She somehow sensed we would be receptive and she could truly be herself with us, and when she asked her endless questions and gave advice we listened and took it in the spirit in which she intended. "I'm not always myself you know," she said. I have often see it when everyone is present, she will sit in the corner being quiet, with that same sombre, searching look on her face, as if the conversation around her is unfathomable. Fred's brother Bob patronizes her, treats her like a buffoon, speaks to her in a whiny nasal voice that cracks like a teenager's. But when the climate is right, she is charming, talkative, the centre of attention.

Oma is the indisputable all-powerful matriarch of this family yet she always feels like an outsider, always in trouble with the rest of the family, a bewildered scapegoat who takes all the blame for missed schedules or interrupted conversations. She says she is always doing something inept or inappropriate. But I love her sense of mischief, the way she pokes fun at stuffiness and pomposity. I also love that she never hesitates to show her vulnerabilities.

Yet she always leaves me with a lot of questions. Why does someone so wealthy, entitled and powerful in a family structure identify herself as an underdog? And why are her children blocked in so many ways?

Fred's Uncle John is in the hospital because of depression. He can't even function any more. He has finally faced up to the fact that there's something wrong and work is not going to cure it. Is this Oma's legacy? I have seen Oma's solemn expression on John's face.

### **Oct. 16**

I love my new commute from Westmount Station. I feel like I am living a daily life in Mittel-Europa. I sit on one of the dark benches waiting for men to enter with attaché cases, trains with piercing whistles, Simenon mysteries. The man who punches the tickets recognizes me now, when I come in to the station and request a ticket for Valois. He hooks his fingers in his belt loops and rolls back and forth in his cowboy boots and shepherds us all to the right side of the tracks.

The station is old and hot with curving corners and high dark benches that look and smell like church pews. Old and shadowy light trying to fight its way through heavy wood and thickly-layered paint. Outside the tracks sometimes cross, sometimes run parallel, fields stretching out with them in various shades of green, gold, rust, distant, fluid and inexorable.

Three young women stood outside the train with a group of children with satchels and schoolbags, all speaking French. I half-expect to see goats following along with bells around their necks. The sun is warm and I could be in France or Switzerland right now. The train itself is small and narrow with steep stairs leading to an upper compartment, seats that hinge backwards, forwards.

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At work, Ken Noakes, the phantom-man who seems to live a hermitlike existence in the back room, has emerged a couple of times to talk to me. He is younger than the others, probably near my age. Tom is tall and lanky, always seems to struggle to stay contained inside his suit. He is friendly jokes with everyone. Howard Gliserman is intelligent, blustery and somewhat fussy. Kevin Orr is quiet and tentative. Mary Good, the book-keeper, is genteel and sophisticated. She has a dreamy expression and doodles on her pad. She talks as if in a reverie, thinking out loud. Yet she often makes very acute observations.

### **Oct. 17**

Enjoying the Astrology class immensely. I have met some interesting people. I really like Susan Kelly. She is humorous and really knows her stuff. Her analogies are dramatic and bring the signs, symbols and houses to life. Yet it's not hard to pick up a real vulnerability. When it came time to do calculations I started "fogging out." Math has never been my strong suit. Susan picked it up and said my Neptune must be conjunct Mercury. "Neptune hates to be confronted with anything." But there's a certain expression she gets on her face that intrigues me, shy, private but shadowy. Storm clouds cross overhead and there is a shadow, just for a moment.

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Another talk with Ken at work. He is miserable at Broadcast Holdings. When he first married he had a good job as a draughtsman for a major company. Then he was laid off; unemployed for 10 months. He took this job out of desperation, admits he's marking time here. Says he wakes up every morning feeling demoralized and knows his wife is "bleeding for him." He feels a bond with me, I think, because we are both outsiders here. Although we're both, in theory, part of the company, we're set apart from any of the real action, one-off employees sequestered in departments that are peripheral to getting and fulfilling contracts. Worst of all, Ken has nothing to do and I'm basically making it up as I go along. He is like me in other ways too; not much for chit-chat and office gossip. He does his work, stays detached, keeps his eyes and ears open.

Claire McCole is the office mother. She knows the whereabouts and activities of all her “fellas.” She is the secretary, receptionist, plays hostess to anyone coming into the office, answers the phones, cleans the floor. She is also information central and it’s funny to see these young men gravitate to her corner of the office, reminding me of boys in a kitchen surrounding their mother. Claire is indefatigable. I don’t think I could list all of her activities; full-time work, daughter’s diving, son’s hockey. She vibrates with energy. Her grey eyes often have a somewhat crazed or fanatical expression, and her grey hair is wiry and seems to crackle with electricity. When she emerges from her desk, she is surprisingly ungainly and reminds me of a turkey, her legs and feet looking too small for her body. She is always craning her neck, and I would swear she can swivel her head right around like an owl.

She is full of self-importance - the World of Claire McCole. Yet she also has a kind heart and interest in people. John and Howard, especially, seem to have this motherly relationship with her. John very much like a little boy, confiding in her, always asking for her advice, even getting her to referee between him and his wife Debbie. I have disliked John from the first day, and I can’t say why. Howard and Claire constantly quarrel. They are both short-fused, but the quarreling is just another aspect of the motherly role she seems to play here. If John is the good son, Howard is the one who acts out rebellion while at the same time tied to her apron strings. Claire yells, guffaws, tells them off and says she is proud of being “considered in some circles as a crazy lady.”

## **Oct. 20**

Astrology lecture at Café L’Herberie. The subject (transgressions, progressions) was too advanced for me, especially the math part. Just once it would be nice to be part of the “in” group, the ones who sit at the front and are friends of the speakers. Instead, I circle the edges, snatching information like scraps of meat from a campsite. Speaker Marc Beriault looks like a chain-smoking rake, but his mind is retentive and his eyes focus on individuals. He listens with his head cocked, alert, as if sensing something in the air.



A blond who reminded me of Marlene Dietrich tilted her head back and slowly exhaled her cigarette smoke. She sat, waiting to be convinced. All these young women searching for something. Is there any way to get around the intensity, the pressure of so many individuals who want personal attention? Is there anyone here who is not sitting at one of these tables secretly hoping to be “discovered,” that their true selves will be revealed, or that the speaker will say something profound which will define them for all time? They hope to hear just a few little words, “You have an amazing chart,” or “your chart shows you have great natural talent.” We all sit here waiting for our thoughts, feelings, innermost essence to be read, crying out loud with our eyes for a piece of recognition that will confirm our uniqueness and satisfy an almost sexual hunger. Of course I’m not immune, but my star-chart is very simple and no astrologer will ever use it as a sample.

I was dubious about Marc at first, but ended up respecting his knowledge. He said clients with diaries were like gold to him. I liked that statement! I also liked what he said about Scorpios. He said many people were afraid of Scorpio because they will never let you remain complacent about the world. “There is always that power within a Scorpio person to reveal something you may have never wanted to see, to change your entire conception of the world, and many people are afraid of that latent quality.”

## **Oct. 21**

Croissant de lune with Fred, my favourite café, a lovely place on St-Denis with stone walls and a stained glass window. They play everything from Billie Holliday to Gregorian chants and we can linger as long as we like over café au lait and croissants tout garni. It is a student haunt and they come in, dressed in parachute pants and scarves with “Le Devoir” tucked under their arms. I’ve also never seen so many brands of cigarettes in one place: Export A, Mark 10, Nazionali, Camel, Salem, Gitane. But I love the atmosphere, the soft lights, the sun filtering through the window.

Fred and I started discussing education and I ranted over how wrong-headed the back-to-basics approach is. Education is one subject I can tirade about endlessly although I have no more idea how to solve the problems as anyone else does. But I really don't think Basics is the answer. Increasing focus on the three Rs and adding mandatory course requirements is a restrictive action. Why should someone be penalized if they can't do math? What will society lose if they restrict the future of someone who doesn't read well, but is gifted at making things? I say more flexibility and inclusiveness not less!

### **Oct. 25**

At work, Ken teases me about the way I sit at my desk with work piled in front of me, meanwhile looking out the corner of my eye so I can see who's coming or going. He laughs because he does the same thing. Every day he comes into work he feels he's letting his wife down, and they have a baby on the way. Ken always wanted to be a policeman and has also considered being a truck driver or railway brakeman but he doesn't think he could handle the lifestyle. He looks like a high school jock but talks about movies like *Cross Creek* and *Das Boot*. He paints in oils and would like to open his own flower shop. So much for first impressions and judging people by appearances.

### **Nov. 2**

Val visited for the weekend and it turned out to be a disaster. Val and I always relate better when Fred isn't around, and the three of us coexisted around each other. She spent most of the time talking about other people and places: Emile, the frat house, Jim. On Friday night, she spent most of the time trying to decide whether or not she was going to a frat house party.

Spent most of Saturday prowling through antique stores along Notre-Dame. We dressed Fred up as a German soldier while the proprietor, looked on appraisingly. He wore a striped scarf and seemed to be eating an apple at us. Val tried on a red hat with a coxcomb, and the man said she either looked like a member of the Macedonian army or the St-Hubert chicken. He said this in a dry tone, continuing to munch on the apple. Val decided she didn't like this store as much as she did last time, and we left.

Val's knowledge of Montréal is as selective as her knowledge of Tarot or astrology. She has never noticed the poverty in this area of the city, the tenements crumbling just behind the elegant store fronts. She was surprised and revolted when we told her she was in St-Henri. She relates to the world almost totally subjectively, having no interest above the personal. When I told her about my new job she kept repeating that I was so lucky and I always landed on my feet. There's no point in arguing. She lives in a fantasy where she has to be the victim.

We went into another store and she bought a doll for \$165.00. She consulted me as to whether or not she should buy it. I started to feel like good old Fifth Business again, tall and stooped, urging her to do it without actually speaking. "Yes, do it. Keep undoing all the things I wouldn't do myself and see what happens. Let's see what chaos can ensure without it ever being traced to me. Bwa ha ha." Works both ways, though. She has never pulled me back from the edge. She can be callous and self-centered. Sometimes spontaneity and joie-de-vivre just isn't enough.

The nicest part of the weekend occurred on Saturday night. The three of us walked up and down Bishop and Crescent streets. They were deserted on this chill blue night. We spied a fire going in a place called Grumpy's and we turned in. We drank rye and ginger out of champagne glasses in front of the fire and listened to Louis Armstrong. This was magic – the kind of moment that only happens with Val.

The weekend went downhill from there. When we returned to the apartment Val discovered her doll did not seem quite right, the dress was too small and it was oddly strung together. It seemed that she had been cheated. She was seething and I, set up as her accomplice, felt guilty. We were a lugubrious trio at Croissant de lune on Sunday.

Later at one of her favourite restaurants, La Cracovie, Val got a fly in her soup. At Rueben's, her baked potato was raw. She decided to leave the city as soon as possible and we got her to the bus with moments to spare. She concluded that someone had cast a spell on her and it was either me or Jim. Shazzam.

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Astrology class tonight. It's one thing I really enjoy, that I do for myself that is not dependent on the ups and downs of my work days, especially days like this when I feel dull and backward and my days are numbered because I have no idea what they even want me to do. Stayed for a while after the others left and talked to Susan about my chart. All the planets in my chart are on the east side in the left corner. Pluto is in the 10<sup>th</sup> house at the midheaven. I have one lone planet, Uranus, on the west side. Susan said I have to be in control, that I can't stand to be controlled by anyone. Pluto's position could mean a lot of very subtle behind the scenes reforms or service at work, the formation of a union.

I told Susan I felt as if I had walked down into a tunnel and I don't know where I'll end up. She said she had gone through a similar transit and it had been extremely hard for her. She lost a sense of her life having any meaning or purpose and thought seriously about suicide. I can see that kind of powerful emotion in her. She pressed her hands to her heart and said, "What is in the heart is the most important thing in my life now."

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A keep on keeping on kind of day. The weather was gentle and I walked to the bus stop as if given a reprieve. Received a postcard from Els, a card and letter from Nancy Dewdney, more mail from Fred Merritt and Sharon called. A day of friendships and communication. Now foggy outside, a soft silvery light making everything appear grey-blue. A day for reverie, inspiration.

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It's a Tom Waits sort of day, sort of slow and sad when the snow is falling and you're on the 211 bus looking out into the maze of streets, the oddly-cut corners, the balconies and turrets grafted onto buildings that could tip over at any moment with multi-coloured shirts and sheets flapping on lines in the snow. The light is slivery, blue, more like moonlight than sunlight, and the wood is silver and grey and there's the toffee Christ with his arms outstretched and the statue of the man who stands with his arms folded across his chest like some kind of wrestling champion.

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Today at work a man sneaked into the office through the back door and kissed Mary! He went into Bob's office (Bob was in Ottawa) and started tinkering with some of his knick-knacks until John escorted him out. Everyone teased Mary about it all day. She joked that he must have thought she was his mother, or, as Howard conjectured, his therapist. Later on, Claire brought in her nephew's two rambunctious black labs who romped down the halls. Everyone gathered in doorways laughing and inducing the dogs to go tear up Bob's office. This little play-office is located in an apartment building and is a repository of the absurd. I haven't seen Beatrice for a while. She lives in the building and wanders into the office from time to time to visit Claire, wearing carpet slippers, dribbling ashes over the carpet.

Ken and I talked about how our jobs are similar. He also expressed how disappointed and disillusioned he is with Bob Jeffcott. Later this afternoon he returned, feeling badly because he thought he might have disillusioned me. We both talked about what we wanted to do with our jobs, our frustrations and lack of support. And it seems to come down to Jeffcott having these two positions in his company, but not wanting to spend any money on developing them. I can't connect with other libraries and research centres if I can't get money for a computerized library catalogue or even make long distance telephone calls. Then Ken and I turned around and were apologetic with each other, as if afraid we were disillusioning each other with our suspicions. His gaze is steady, frank, level, face smooth, ingenuous. His eyes are a clear blue-green. We have become good friends here.

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Went to Huntingdon to pick up our chairs from Marjorie Johnston, the woman we met at the Hudson flea market who said she could cane our chairs. It was a strange journey, long straight road, drizzle, wet snow. She lives in an isolated cedar house, alone except for a dog who looked as tiny and unkempt as she did. The house was dark, dank and full of books. She is gregarious and kept up a steady stream of talk. She lives the way she wants to and the couch with the blanket over it looked quite cozy. But I started feeling strange, kind of melancholy, and I couldn't think of anything to say to Fred on the way back. I couldn't comment about her, the chairs, or anything I had noticed as if I had taken a vow of silence.

## **Nov. 28**

Drew a thank-you card for Susan Kelly based on an illustration *I found in Telephone Engineer and Management magazine*. She liked it; said it was lovely. At the end of the class, Dorothy Mills offered me a ride home. She wanted to talk to Susan so the three of us lingered for about an hour talking about many things. Dorothy's Sun and Mercury are conjunct Pluto, which gives her a serious outlook on life. Susan told her she needed to go deeper and that she'd never be satisfied skimming the surface. Dorothy mentioned she was dissatisfied with her job and was afraid she would never find something fulfilling. I told her about my own issues with work. It really seems this is a struggle that goes way beyond the three of us. Everyone I know seems to be in the same boat.

Susan works at Pratt & Whitney doing copy-editing, typing and various admin things, plagued by secretaries and "office-ladies" who are stultifying conventional and keep wanting to fix her up for the office party. Dorothy asked Susan if she was married. Susan said no and described a whirlwind relationship she had had with another Leo during a Uranus transit. They met one day, went out the next and moved in together on the third day. But typical of Uranus, it ended as abruptly as it began.

I mentioned Jim, that he was a Pisces, Moon in Cancer, Taurus ascendant, directly opposing my ascendant. Susan responded immediately. “Oh boy. Scorpio is on his descendant so he must have projected everything he had inside himself onto you. He probably idealized you to the point where he didn’t see you as a person any more.” I just stared at her, this was so bang-on.

We started talking about medical astrology. Susan became interested in that field after a guest astrologer told her what was wrong and what to do about it. Susan had had hyperglycemia so badly it made her depressed and drained to the point where she almost committed suicide. I mentioned that I have no tolerance for drugs and she said I had to be extremely careful about anything I took with my stressed Uranus-Mercury and 12<sup>th</sup> House sensitivity to drugs.

It was a special way to end the classes. I hope I see Susan again sometime. It’s the first time since Seneca I’ve really connected with someone.

## **Dec. 5**

Another work day. Jeffcott seems to be better at creating chaos than management. Mary Good was worked up over Jeffcott’s book-keeping “system” and waiting until the last minute to do everything. Claire was enraged over Manny, BHCL’s contract salesman. Manny looks sleazy and the only one in the office who likes him is Bob, who thinks he is a “super-salesman.” But it is Claire who dislikes him the most. She said she will turn and walk out of the Christmas party if she finds him there.

Jeffcott and Howard proceeded to get into a loud argument in Howard’s office about Howard wanting to use the company’s computer to store his list of wines. Jeffcott, who has a booming baritone, burst into a melodic “No no no no no no no ...” Howard then wrote a series of insulting song lyrics about Jeffcott and posted them in Kevin’s office. Kevin merely laughed and said in his inimitable quiet droll way, “You’ve missed your calling, you belong on Tin Pan Alley.”

A man with a gold-plated belt buckle shaped like a pig entered and started stripping the panels off the ceiling. Claire found a wasp's nest and everyone gathered around to examine it. Tom had a meeting in half an hour and everyone in the company started beating the photocopier to get it to print a report in time. Five people, all at once, gave him directions to the Holiday Inn and he left, looking very confused, with moments to spare. Later we found out he had indeed got lost.

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Went to Donna Rafolski's astrology class party. She lives in St-Laurent but it felt like Siberia, bitterly cold, snow crammed along the sides of brown stone triplexes. Joe Golinowski and I were the first to arrive. He is a draughtsman who lives and works in the East End. He wears shirts with two or three buttons open, medallions, and cowboy boots with rolling heels. He also enjoys stock car racing. Susan arrived, and as soon as she sat in the rocking chair one of Donna's cats joined her. She said, "One day I will be known as the cat lady of Bernard, shuffling down the street followed by all the neighbourhood cats, saying "Here kitty, here kitty." Gwen breezed in soon after with her crest of red hair. She is tiny but indomitable, full of energy and sense of adventure. She faithfully made her way to St-Viateur from the South Shore every Wednesday, swinging from buses to Metro.

Donna was feisty and humorous as ever. Gwen kept things going with her spirit, but the conversation was a funny mix of odd subjects and personal anecdotes. Donna talked about some of her friends. Gwen, Susan and I ended up talking about vomiting. We didn't even talk about astrology. There was a sense that everyone was looking toward the door as if someone was missing, or if one other person was to arrive the party might come to life. Eventually, Joe drove Gwen, Kim, Susan and me to the nearest Metro. It was on the Metro that we talked about astrology. Then we became so absorbed in our talk, Susan almost missed her stop. Just goes to show it is impossible to predict when a real connection will occur.



### **Dec. 7-9**

Kingston for the weekend. Feels as if the cold has penetrated into my bones and I'll never be warm again. We arrived on Friday night and I sat up talking with Wheeze until John came in. I found out she had once wanted to go to St Catherine's and take a Horticulture program, and it was the need to get farther away from Niagara Falls that made her choose Queen's. She spent the last three weeks doing little except making Christmas crafts. She and some other people had set up a table in Mac-Corry, but her partners cheated her and there was too much competition so she sold very few items.

Sharon arrived Saturday morning and we met her at the station. I was struck by the completely homogeneous group of students at the station, all in their Queen's jackets. Sharon was tense getting off the train and bombarded us with talk, but she settled down after a while and we spent most of the afternoon roaming downtown through all our usual favourite places. I had forgotten how frequently the stores move in Kingston. They don't close – they just up and change location. Fred and I once saw someone moving pieces of a store front down Princess Street in the dead of night. Ross's Gift Store hasn't moved, and the ageless woman recognized me and asked where my friend (Val) was. Val and I were always there together.

Wheeze took a gourmet cooking class and spent most of the afternoon preparing a special chicken dish while Sharon and I sat at the table and talked. It was so comfortable and harmonious. Marsha's younger brother Derek called to wish her a happy birthday and it looks as if the family is beginning to accept John as her life-partner. Proving once again what a reprobate he is, John took her out and bought her all kinds of kitchen devices for her birthday.

More and more I can see the influence of the Moon in Marsha, the power of this Cancerian moon; crafts, cooking, creating a home, her emotional attachment to her family. The moon also gives her that taste for the absurd or macabre, her liking for Edgar Allan Poe. Her emotional depth and strength. She described a play Mark had starred in, which turned out to be the performance of his life. In this play Mark played a character very much like his father. While watching the play, Marsha started feeling their mother was there with them. Then she noticed a small valise used as a prop in the play; it was identical to her mother's little suitcase.

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Today's work drama. Jeffcott made Kevin redo all the figures for the Omninet project within minutes of a presentation. Kevin recruited Ken and me to help and I was muddling about quite ineptly. Jeffcott came out of his office and stood over my shoulder. Ken appeared, helped me out and the work was finally finished so Jeffcott could leave for his meeting. Kevin was sympathetic and told me he couldn't work either when Bob was looking over his shoulder. "I might as well be blowing bubbles." Howard is facetious, but Kevin is master of the quiet bon mot.

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Another Friday. Bob sent John to cut down a Christmas tree for the office. According to Claire, he took a tantrum yesterday because there wasn't yet a tree set up and decorated. John brought a tree back, Mary set it up and Howard photocopied dollar bills with Jeffcott's face pasted over the Queen. He posted a sign above the tree which read, "This is the Broadcast Holdings Money Tree. Place your money with Bob Jeffcott and watch it go up in smoke."

Jeffcott likes to think of himself as some kind of big business wheeler-dealer, but in fact, he is terribly insecure. One day he was meeting someone in his office. I overheard him say, "I'm an orphan. Nobody had sympathy for the poor little orphan." He said it in the tone of a poorly disguised joke. His laugh is loud and nervous; forced. The only reason he puts up with Howard's insubordination is because he has to, Howard's father being the company lawyer. Jeffcott has the requisite younger trophy wife, Bella, who always looks petulant, and runs a hairdressing salon in the same building as BHCL. He seems to live in constant fear of losing Bella and constantly makes non-jokes about how he worries whenever one of his employees goes to the salon for a hair cut. Volatile personality, volatile work situation.

## **Dec. 16**

Dark, the night of the office party. Lost on the way to Hudson although we've driven there many times before. So conscious of the darkness swelling all around me. I seem to becoming more and more sensitive to it all the time. The only light at all comes from the headlights, illuminating only a small area, which is never still but always in motion and the darkness is great and vast, moving in like an ocean. Even inside, there is darkness curled in every corner, deep in the grain of the wood. It is too dark tonight and I am moving along the bottom of the sea in a submarine.

The party was held at the Willows, which looked like a British inn. Everyone was dressed up, looking completely unfamiliar. I was dismayed by the darkness in the room, the arrangements of people at tables, everyone looking like they were trapped inside a Rembrandt painting. Bella made up the seating arrangements and Fred and I ended up sitting with one of the hairdressers and her boyfriend. Conversation did not flow.

Jeffcott made a speech about the company and gave all the employees a gift, including me, which was a pleasant surprise. A colleague of his from Ottawa made a short speech about small companies and how exciting it was to be on the ground floor of a new and growing venture. Claire, sitting behind me, made sarcastic remarks such as, "When are we getting our next paycheques?" This was an old reference, dating back to the year when they had the choice of going without a paycheque or closing down the project altogether. Bob was decidedly unamused by Claire's interjections. Jeffcott likes to do things in a big way and can be extremely obstinate about doing everything his own way. Everything gets done at the very last moment because he won't delegate. He also never likes what anyone else has done. He appreciates the established tasteful "bourgie" arts; reproductions of Group of Seven landscapes, Thomas Birch paintings. He bought the women Christmas presents from Birks. When giving out the presents he told me I was the one person in the company who didn't give him any trouble and by all accounts the library was being run perfectly. Well, there's not much I can do besides make it up as I go along. This was never a real library position – I am there as part of a government contract to make Jeffcott's company look more impressive.

Staff gift exchange took place. Bella and the hairdressers were all included. One of the hairdressers who has never seen me, drew my name and gave me a connect-the-dots sex book, a Polish handkerchief and a book entitled *Cucumbers Are Better Than Men Because ...*. This proved to be the hit of the evening. At least, Claire was chuckling and snorting over it.

As soon as we could, Fred and I went and sat with Tom Wilson and his partner, Joan. Turns out Fred and Tom had been classmates all through school since grade one or so. It was Tom who first got Fred interested in short-wave radios. Joan is a Queen's alumnus. Our table became the liveliest one in the room. The hairdressers gathered into their own coterie with Bob sitting near by, keeping his eye on Bella, as they quoted from the cucumber book. Tom, Joan, Fred and I ended up being the last ones out the door, following Jeffcott's party. Bob seemed irritated that we had outlasted them, but he kissed me on the cheek and wished me a merry Christmas.

Fred and I drove Howard back to the city. It felt like a very long, mythical journey. At one point in the evening, Bob had teased me about putting them all in my novel. He had remembered the interview when I told him I was writing one. I had forgotten about it until Howard asked me about the novel and what it was like. He asked me if I wrote like Zane Grey or Henry James. I said it was more like Henry James than Zane Grey or Richard Rohmer. Then we had a Wonderland kind of conversation in which he asked, "Is your book a kind of impressionist painting, combining elements of all kinds of different writing on one canvas?" He may have been joking but that is the best way of describing it. All in all, it was one of the most enjoyable and sophisticated conversations I have ever had about writing. Go figure. It was about three in the morning when we dropped him off at his brownstone in Westmount. So endeth the Mad Hatter's tea party.

### **23 Dec.**

Holiday visits. Stopped in Kingston to spend the night with Marsha. Kingston is our halfway point, refuge on our hobbit's journeys. She is so generous and nurturing with food. May Fern came and joined us for dinner. She is very much torn between two worlds; traditional Chinese family and the radical individualism of North America.

Last I heard, she had moved out of the house and her parents cut her off. Her mother relented a little by telling her she could come over to the house for an hour on Christmas day, as long as she brought presents. I know how I would respond, but she is complying. Her family is very important to her. She said she really admired Fred and me for taking the chance and moving back to Montréal. “They’re a courageous couple,” Marsha agreed in full-on owl demeanor.

Visited Eileen and Sophia. Sophia was in a feisty mood and aired all her views on women’s lib, declaring that women’s lib has killed romance. Meanwhile, she also said that men are all worthless and she was able to raise her children all alone during war time without a man. There are so many ways of being a feminist. Sophia would probably succumb to apoplexy if I ever suggested she was one. Eileen is gentle and nurturing. There was fire in the fireplace. She brought us creamy rich egg nogs and minced pie. The tree was set up and decorated with Marsha’s crafts. Eileen was sad though, missing her sons, and she is terribly homesick for England. She loves being surrounded by young people, especially men, and adores John and Fred.

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Highway 400 on Christmas Eve, CFNY special on the radio. The Mars-Bar playing mysterious, haunting music. Malcolm McLaren’s “Madame Butterfly” is marvellously eerie. The 400 is a rough highway, one you would not expect to join Toronto and Barrie. It should be located much farther north. A Gray Coach bus overturned at the Simcoe County sign, which is also the beginning of the snow line. It feels like we’re driving along a threshold, about to tip into a mysterious world without borders.

Everyone seemed much the same in Barrie. There was an awkward moment when I told them Fred and I were staying at the Lake Simcoe Motel, but the thought of having our own space and being able to take a long bath was worth offending them. My father seemed to perk up when we came in. He had been lying on the couch under a blanket, but got up to greet us. I feel so protective toward him these days. We sat around the table playing board games, including Nancy and her boyfriend, Rich. Cutler was there – all was right with the world.

## Dec. 28

Spent the day in Toronto. A warm melt-water day, more like March than December. Although it snowed on Christmas Eve, the roads were steaming as if we were slaloming around geysers. Bleeding brick walls, a streak of peacock blue. A ghostly day of keeping on the move, keeping away from all that would weigh me down. I felt nostalgic for Toronto, the Seneca days. We wandered down Queen St W, and I ogled the clothes in the Ms Emma boutique. Went into a secondhand bookstore and was surprised to be spoken to in English. I have grown so used to two languages that only hearing one seems incomplete. Wandered down some side streets and alleys. This is the kind of day that brings everything back, where you realized nothing ever really goes away, especially old feelings. The melted snow leaves behind debris from the end of the ice age, brick walls, prehistoric shelters sinking into bog.

The backs of the houses exist as separate personalities, repressed subconscious. All that's been left behind, rejected, stashed, hoarded, ignored, a tumult of objects, all comes back in the alleys. A life separate from that of the street; dilapidated, tumultuous, ramshackled, water soaking through, dissolving all the ephemeral facades.

Wandered the Beaches for a while then decided to make our way to Oshawa so Fred could speak to Pam Irwin. Stopped in Pickering to call Sharon. On the way back from Oshawa into Toronto I could feel the darkness moving in like a front, a tidal wave, making the lights seem as if they had been left on too long and were about to flicker out. We decided to go to Sharon's via the Allen Expressway. I happened to glance over at the car beside us and saw the driver was Kim Jackson! We both gaped, then rolled down our windows. Kim shouted that she was going to Ellen's for supper and to call her later. Relaxing time at Sharon's. The apartment felt like a refuge, both from the darkness of the highways and the return to Barrie. We talked and watched *Dallas*.

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Visited the Professor and Ron in their new house. It is smaller than 8 Lexington, but exquisitely decorated. If Lexington was all Ron, this house is completely the Professor, filled with all her objects, things I haven't seen since her wonderful old apartment on Penetang Street. I also noticed photos of Janet's parents and grandparents on the walls.

There are no mementos of Ron's family – only one photo of the two girls. Janet was beautifully dressed, silk scarf, white shirt cinched by a belt and a lovely print skirt. Supper was beautifully laid out. Her taste and decorating ability take my breath away, not only because of the harmony and perfectionism, but also because of its boldness and sureness of touch. My things are arranged haphazardly. Everything she has or uses, no matter how utilitarian, is beautiful. Both she and Ron are gracious hosts. Ron toasted, "to special company." Janet and I talked about slurs, back-handed compliments, our cooking skills (or lack there of) and about the many faux pas we have made. We looked at photos of their trip west and some books about Canada. Janet and I mocked the photos the editors had chosen of Montréal; scenes of Place Ville Marie and the Chateau Champlain. Ron said he had only been to Montréal once, to attend a carpet sales convention.

Later Sir Jefforie joined us, debonaire as ever, yet irreverent sense of humour still intact. He told us that Penny Renton, our high school librarian died of a heart attack. It was a shock. She was lively and crazy, full of spirit. She sometimes smoked little cigars in the library room, and this room was always a centre for the best teachers, such as Mr Beltz, Mr McCallum, Mr Kelly. She used to kick me out of the library, and once she raided my locker for overdue books. She brought so much humour and spirit to her job and everyone loved her. Her library was my refuge and I am so sorry she's gone.

The Professor lit some candles and played music. Sir J and I joked about beer belly polkas, Ricky Ricardo and Acker Bilk until we couldn't stop laughing. Then Janet put the cat downstairs and it made noises that sounded like a prowler. "It's Uncle Willie," I said. "Uncle Willie ... please come forth." After that, there was not turning back. No more pretense at adulthood. The Professor put on old 78s and pretended she was forcing us to listen to sentimental Irish music.

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Saw Rosalind and Brian. She called us at the motel and invited us to the Simcoe County Museum to see an exhibition of her mother's paintings; portraits of angels and saints. I have always been terribly uncomfortable at her family's house. Her mother wears flowery Victorian-style dresses, her hair cut in straight bangs, the same battleship romanticism as Rosalind. At least she's friendly and hospitable.

Much much worse is Mr Cotter. Sir J used to serve him in the beer store and we guffawed over all the letters he spewed in the local newspapers. My father has seen him in the post office. He also mentioned those letters and said that Mr Cotter is more right-wing than anyone he knows, ranting at least once a week about godless Russians in everyone's closets. My favourites are the anit-abortionist rants.

The Cotter house is always in chaos, thrift-shop couches and chairs mixed with some heavy dark Victorian pieces. Three or four of her brothers were in the room and they all look so much alike I can never attach a name to a face. Seeing Rosalind was a shock. She has lost a lot of weight. In fact, she is gaunt, pale; austere. Her hair was pulled back into one single thick braid. She also wore round gold-framed glasses that made her look as if she stepped out of "American Gothic." Reverend Dimmesdale, aka Brian, looked the same as I remembered.

The mood lightened once we got to the museum. Rosalind wore a floor-length skirt, which made her look less austere and more the way I remembered her. Brian didn't seem so melancholy after a while. He was interested in the exhibits and asked a lot of questions about the area. He would speak in batches of words, a burst of chattiness, then grow quiet again and wander off. This time I noticed how much he looked like the Cotters.

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After seeing Rosalind we spent the rest of the afternoon with Chris Hopwood. Unlike the Cotters, Chris was relaxed and informal. Sometimes the Professor can be too immaculate and ideal and it was comforting to hear Chris say she's allergic to housework and she only vacuums once a month. We had a humorous, light-hearted conversation. She likes her job with the youth group at her church and finds it challenging. It was interesting to hear her express how much she has disliked supervisors at the other places she's worked. She sounded exactly like me. She has also been the only person during this holiday who seemed the slightest bit interested in hearing about my job. There's something just a tad disheartening about finally getting a job in a field you're actually interested in, and no one is interested in hearing about it. Chris is the only one who asked me any questions about it.



She talked about how much her sister Alison loves being a mother and that she herself can't quite relate to it. Joyce, on the other hand, has confided that she is afraid to have children because she wouldn't know what to do if it was a boy – she couldn't see herself faced with a teenaged boy. No wonder! Four girls in the Hopwood family. I confessed to being afraid of being indifferent to a child, that I wouldn't give a child enough attention. "Would you really, Les," Chris asked, sounding truly surprised. Then she agreed she would also have to make a conscious decision to be loving, whereas someone like Alison would do it naturally.

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Visit with Kim. Benjamin is energetic and demands attention all the time. While Kim prepared us dinner, Ben watched videos. He is a child of the media. His toys are all replicas of TV characters. He quotes from popular shows and imitates Michael Jackson. Yet I was touched when he brought out the little book I had given him for Christmas last year, *The Night Before Christmas*.

Kim has broken up with Jeff and is, typically, masking her hurt with bravado and statements that sound rather callous. She is so uninhibited she will say the first thing that pops into her head. The rift occurred just before Christmas when he changed his mind about spending the day with Kim and Ben and decided to spend it with his mother and own two children instead. Kim was very upset and said it was wrong for a grown man to feel he had to spend the day with his mother, who has always disliked Kim and felt she was beneath him.

Jeff, on his part, thought Kim was being inflexible and rigid. She said she has always felt that Jeff wasn't really her type and that she was going out with him because he was good to her and he was the best man available at the time.

Kim is two people. She is spontaneous, quick, impulsive, generous. She can also be judgmental, inflexible, critical and moral, talking a lot about what should or shouldn't be done. Her instincts are always right on target but her tongue can unknowingly cut to the quick. These sides of Kim alternate, turning like phases of the moon.

Within moments, she can declare that boys should be able to play with dolls if they want, then turn right around and laugh at a man on TV for being too feminine. “Who would ever want to go out with someone like that,” she said derisively, with that short dry laugh. But I admire her spirit, courage and initiative, though. She and Ben live in an Ontario housing complex in a very bleak area of Scarborough, surrounded by nothing but cement; shipping centers, highways, etc. Her apartment seems like the one warm place in this inhumane world. She has created a real home, for Ben and for all her friends.

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New Year’s Eve. Called Andrea from a phone booth at a service centre near Bowmanville. We talked for about forty minutes and the wind gusted and I was freezing, but it was worth it. We wished each other a happy New Year and she said she was delighted to hear from me. She thought the card I sent her was beautiful and she would put it up with all the other things I had sent her. She said I had the most wonderful taste. The first thing she asked me about was the novel, and I was thrilled. She understood perfectly and did not ask any stupid questions when I said I was sure Seal Books wouldn’t publish it and that I was fairly certain I wouldn’t win the contest. The contest was really only a target, a date to aim for. She asked me if I could submit the manuscript to other publishers when I got it back. I hadn’t really thought of that. This is exactly the response and advice I needed, down-to-earth and practical! We talked about books and travelling, and I also told her a bit about my work. She gave me some news about the class. Faye (Dr Zeidman) went on a trip to Israel and found it very meaningful. Andrea asked about Fred Merritt and I told her that he has been deluging me with mail. She said, “Bless his heart” and told me to say hello to him for her next time I wrote.

She told me I was multi-talented and that she had to stand back and gape when she thought of all the things I could do well. When I talk to Andrea I feel I am, or can be, all the things she thinks I am. Although it’s so cold, I felt warm all over when I returned to the car. Spent New Year’s Eve and early hours of 1985 alone with Fred, driving down Highway 2, which was all but deserted.